

THE SELF-PERCEIVED COMMITMENT AND RELATIONSHIP
MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS AMONG FINNISH-CHINESE
COUPLES IN FINLAND:

An Application of the Investment Model in Intercultural Romantic
Relationship Studies

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>The investment model (2003) has been widely used in romantic relationship studies but rarely in an intercultural context. This study tests the investment model by examining Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceptions of commitment level and relationship maintenance behaviors. A qualitative research method with deductive thematic analysis approach is applied.</p> <p>This study finds that Finnish-Chinese couples have relatively high level of commitment. They tend to remain in their relationships, to actively derogate alternatives, to sacrifice self-welfare for gratifying relationship well-being, to perceive their relationships as good and healthy and to choose relationship constructive responses under dissatisfying situations. These findings show that the commitment are positively associated with the relationship maintenance behaviors which consists with the investment model.</p> <p>It is also found that the reward-cost frame influences Finnish-Chinese couples' willingness to sacrifice. Moreover, communication is the most appreciated strategy for them to confront conflicts. Two characteristics of their communication are found which are development and negotiation. Finally, the ways in which culture may have an effect on Finnish-Chinese couples' perceptions of commitment are discussed.</p>	
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	5
2 THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE RESEARCH.....	8
2.1 Previous studies on intercultural romantic relationship.....	8
2.2 Studies in close relationship.....	8
2.3 Interdependence in dyads.....	13
2.4 Investment model: a prolongation of interdependence theory.....	17
2.4.1 Commitment and cognitive interdependence.....	20
2.4.2 Commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors.....	21
3 METHODOLOGY.....	25
3.1 Aims and research questions.....	25
3.2 Data collection.....	26
3.2.1 Qualitative research.....	26
3.2.2 Participants.....	29
3.2.3 Interview procedure.....	30
3.3 Data analysis.....	31
4 RESULTS.....	35
4.1 Self-perception of commitment level.....	35
4.2 Self-perceived relationship maintenance behaviors.....	37
4.2.1 Decision to remain.....	37
4.2.2 Derogation of alternatives.....	38
4.2.3 Willingness to sacrifice.....	39

4.2.4 Perceived superiority.....	40
4.2.5 Tendencies to accommodate.....	42
4.2.6 Development.....	43
4.2.7 Negotiation.....	44
5 DISCUSSION.....	46
5.1 Commitment level.....	46
5.2 Relationship maintenance behaviors.....	51
5.3 Characteristics of Finnish-Chinese couples' accommodation behavior.....	59
5.4 Conclusion.....	63
6 CONCLUSION.....	65
7 FINAL WORDS.....	70
7.1 Evaluation.....	70
7.2 Future work.....	71
8 REFERENCES.....	73
9 APPENDICES.....	83

1 INTRODUCTION

Intercultural marriage has been studied by many scholars in recent years. According to Gaines and Agnew (2003), as a subset of interethnic marriage, intercultural marriage refers to the marriage consists of husband and wife who come from two respective groups and the societies in which they live are linguistically, religiously or historically different. Karis and Killian (2009) also argue that intercultural couple is composed of partners who may possess divergent languages, beliefs, assumptions and values as a result of their socialization in different socio-cultural spaces. Because of such differences, they may experience more complexities than intracultural couples. Although intercultural couples may have to struggle with more complicated situations caused by cultural diversities, their relationships are not as vulnerable as people would imagine. How individuals with different cultural backgrounds maintain their romantic relationships successfully becomes interesting.

Among various intercultural couples, Finnish-Chinese couples are chosen because of the unique difference between Finnish and Chinese culture. According to Schwartz (2003), Finnish culture can be described as relatively individualistic while Chinese culture can be viewed as relatively collectivistic. In Schwartz's co-plot map (2003) of 67 national groups on seven cultural orientations, Finland is marked as high egalitarianism, high autonomy and high harmony. It indicates that Finns may tend to be relatively equal, independent and looking forward to peace and harmony. While China is marked as high hierarchy, high mastery and high embeddedness which is strongly influenced by Confucianism. It implicates that Chinese culture is more likely to emphasize authority, ambition and group orientation. In short, Finnish and Chinese culture emphasize almost

contradictory value orientations which may possibly lead to varied mentalities and behavioral modes in Finnish-Chinese couples. However, other intercultural couples which consist of partners from both “eastern” and “western” culture also have huge cultural differences. It is not a particular characteristic of Finnish-Chinese couples. Then why Finnish-Chinese couples are chosen? Another important factor is my personal experience and identity. As a Chinese student in Jyväskylä university, the special study experience gives me many chances to build contact with Finnish-Chinese couples living in Finland. Their unique relationship stories and episodes give me great inspiration. Moreover, my identity is an important advantage. On one hand, I can understand better how Chinese people think and why they think so. On the other hand, I can communicate better with them and collect more varied information from the interaction. However, this is a double-edged sword. My personal characteristics may have impact on interviewees as well. This will be discussed later in evaluation section.

In addition, the investment model is applied in this study. One important reason to apply this model is that it can give a unique explanation to how Finnish-Chinese couples with such different cultural backgrounds can maintain their romantic relationships successfully. The investment model states that individuals’ particular behaviors and interactions will influence their relationship outcomes (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Moreover, commitment is introduced as a mediator of relationship maintenance behaviors (Gaines & Agnew, 2003), which is a subjective experience depending on individuals’ daily experiences. The emphasis on the unique mediating function of commitment between the bases of dependence and maintenance behaviors makes this theory very different from others. Moreover, it is stated that the commitment is one of the strongest predictors of

relationship dissolution (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010). Therefore, according to the investment model (Gaines & Agnew, 2003) if an individual has relatively high level of commitment, he/she will tend to behave benignly in order to maintain the relationship smoothly and healthy.

Although many researches of investment model have been done in intracultural relationship study, the application of this model in intercultural relationship study is rare. It is not because this model does not fit for intercultural relationship study. On the contrary, it provides a unique conceptual framework with great flexibility for understanding all types of pairings, including intracultural and intercultural relationships (Gaines and Agnew, 2003). Thus it would be great to take this challenge to apply the investment model in intercultural romantic relationship study.

In short, this study will reveal Finnish-Chinese couples's perceptions of commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors in order to examine whether their commitment is positively associated with their maintenance behaviors as the investment model suggests.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 Previous studies in intercultural romantic relationship

Intercultural romantic relationship study is still a new field. In recent years, researchers become interested in this topic, and the total amount of articles and books concerning intercultural marriage and intercultural romantic relationship are increasing.

Scientists with various backgrounds tend to do researches from different scientific perspectives. In consequences, themes regarding intercultural romantic relationship are highly diverse. From interracial issues, like dynamics of interracial intimacy relationships (Foeman & Nance, 1999), and attitudes toward racial mixing (Harris & Trego, 2008); to satisfaction (Gaines & Brennan, 2001); to culture and gender influence (Ting-Toomey, 1991); to motivation (Lampe, 1982); to couple counseling and therapy, like outside influential systems of intercultural couples (Molina, Estrada, & Burnett, 2004), and culture-related stressor in intercultural marriages (Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen, & Monakes, 2011); to relationship maintenance (Reiter & Gee, 2008); to adjustment, like adaptation and decision-making process in intercultural marriages (Romano, 1997), and dialectical approach in adaptation and decision-making process among intercultural relationships (Chen, 2002; Cools, 2006).

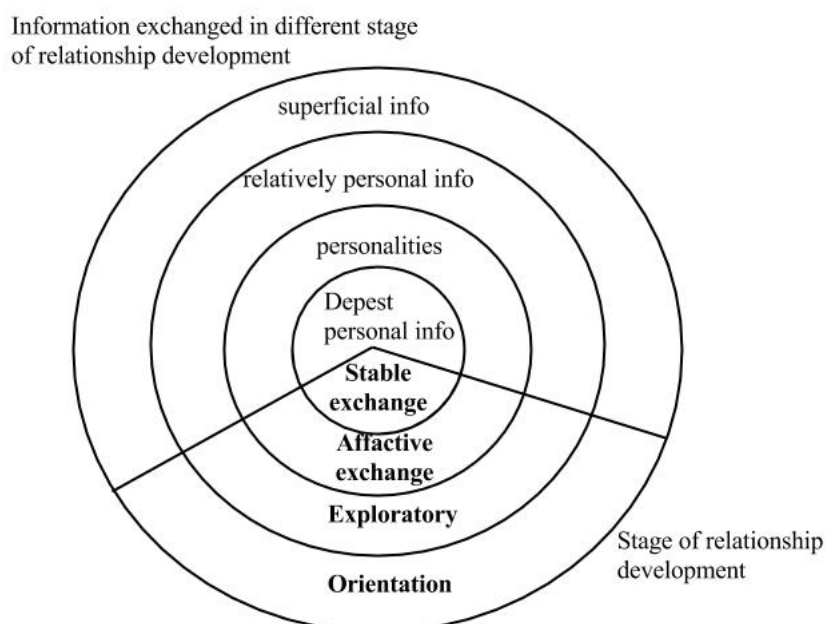
2.2 Studies in close relationship

In this section, several studies in close relationship are introduced. Firstly, three theories are reviewed, which are social exchange theory, social penetration theory and triangular theory. Social exchange theory emphasizes two concepts, rewards and costs. Rewards refer to pleasure and satisfaction the person received in the relationship, while costs refer to

factors that mentally and or physically inhibits or deters the performance of behaviors (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978). Individuals in a relationship are looking forward to rewards instead of costs. According to Devito (2007), individuals will feel satisfied and continue to develop the relationship if the rewards are greater than the costs, if not, the relationship may deteriorate. Therefore this theory states that individual's interactions in a relationship is based on the reward-cost frame. One important social exchange theory is interdependence theory, which will be introduced in the next section.

Social penetration theory states that the information individuals disclose determines the development of relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The more personal information is exchanged, the more intimate the relationship becomes. There are four stages of relationship development, orientation, exploratory, affective exchange, and stable exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973). At orientation stage, individuals change superficial information; At exploratory stage, individuals start to exchange relatively personal information to build a more friendly and relaxed relationship; At affective exchange stage, individuals begin to feel more comfortable to disclose deeper information about their personalities, and a relatively intimate relationship will be built up; At stable exchange stage, a highly intimate relationship appears, and individuals can fully express their feelings. (Chen & Starosta, 2005). Individuals become very intimate and are able to understand each others even without speaking. Two partners become a joint unit sharing a large amount of information and keeping no secrets.

Figure 1: Social penetration theory



Social penetration theory also states that the information exchanged at the orientation stage has a low degree of depth but the topics may be very broad, while at the stable exchange stage, information exchanged are both high in degree of depth and width (Chen & Starosta, 2005). In short, this theory believes that the degree of individuals' disclosure determines the development of relationship and the intimate level.

Triangular theory (Sternberg, 1986) identifies three components of love, which are passion, intimacy and commitment. Passion component refers to the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation, and related phenomena in loving relationship; Intimacy component refers to feelings of closeness, connectedness, and boundedness; Commitment component refers to cognitive elements that are involved in decision making about the existence of and potential long-term commitment to a loving

relationship. Eight types of loving relationship are created by interaction of these three components, which are nonlove, liking, infatuated love, empty, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love, and consummate love. The size of the triangle refers to the amount of love. (Sternberg, 1986).

Figure 2: Eight types of love adapted from Sternberg (1986: 128)

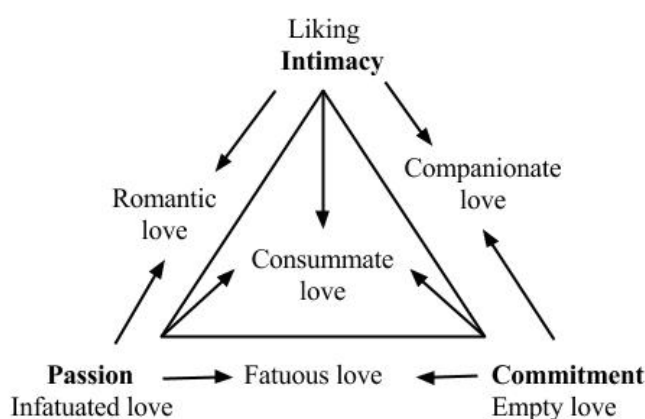


Figure 2 shows an ideal model of different types of love. In short, triangular theory states that different types of close relationship will be formed through the interaction of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

In addition, Devito (2004) develops a six-stage model to describe relationship development: contact, involvement, intimacy, deterioration, repair, and dissolution. Contact stage is the initial stage of relationship development, individuals firstly become aware of the existence of one another and then initiate the interaction in a superficial and impersonal level. The assessment of the partner determines whether to continue or to leave the relationship. At involvement stage, individuals continue to intensify interactions to increase the degree of involvement (Chen & Starosta, 2005). Tests and judgements concerning the other person's commitment will be made at this stage. The result will

decide whether to develop the relationship into the intimacy stage. At intimacy stage, individuals become committed to each other. They make personal commitment to each other and inform their relationship to their family, friends and acquaintance to build up social bond. At deterioration stage, the relationship is weakened by the dissatisfying interactions. Individuals may intentionally reduce interactions and spend more time on other things. At the repair stage, individuals will try to figure out what's wrong with their relationship and to adjust to each other. Both intrapersonal repair and interpersonal repair may occur in this adjustment process. The last stage is dissolution stage, which refers to the termination of the relationship. Individuals will stop seeing each other and announce the termination of their relationship publicly. (Devito, 2004).

In addition, Gottman (1993a) proposes five marital types based on conflict behaviors, which are volatile couple, validating couple, conflict avoidant couple, Hostile couple, and hostile-detached couple. Volatile couple has high level of both positive and negative affect in their marriage. They will fully express their feelings and ideas during conflicts in order to persuade their partner. Validating couple will communicate with each other moderately, their discussion is full of ease and calm. They will listen to each other and to validate the other's expression of the problem. Conflict avoidant couple will try to avoid conflict, and they don't have specific strategy for resolving conflict. They believe that the common ground and values they share overwhelm the differences between them. Thus they would like to accept those differences and continue their relationship.(Gottman, 1993a).

All these three types of couples belong to functional types. Although some characteristics of volatile and conflict avoidant couple seem to be harmful to a marriage,

these two types of couples actually maintain their relationships well. It may be because they can create their own rewards and costs systems, and can reach their own comfort level of emotional expression, and this adaptation ensures the stability of their marriage (Gottman, 1993b). While hostile and hostile-detached couples are two unstable couple types. Hostile couple is characterized by direct engagement in conflict, attentive listening and defensiveness. Hostile-detached couples are emotionally uninvolved with one another, but they get into reciprocated attack and defensiveness as well. (Gottman, 1993a).

2.3 Interdependence in dyads

Interdependence theory is a famous social exchange theory, which is root of the investment model. This theory focuses on giving a reliable explanation and possible prediction of the outcome of interpersonal relationships through the analysis upon persons' respective behaviors and their interactions (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978).

Interdependence theory provides concepts that are useful for understanding how couple members affect each other and how what couples have done in specific interactions influences the general course of their relationship (Holmes, 2002; Kelley, 1979; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). According to Arriaga (2013), interdependence is the core characteristic of this theory and in a mutually dependent relationship, each person has a direct impact on the other's experience and vice versa. "By interaction it is meant that [individuals] emit behavior in each other's presence, they create products for each other, or they communicate with each others" (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959, p.10). This dyadic interaction is relevant to romantic relationship of which the characteristic is that two partners are interdependent by having frequent interactions over an extended time, in another word,

they are affecting the other and being affected by the other (Berscheid, 1983; Fletcher & Overall, 2010; Kelly, 1983).

The specific kinds and degrees of power brought by two persons into intimate relationship to control each other can be depicted in the ‘interdependence matrix’ by means of comparing and contrasting their respective behaviors. The outcome matrix is one important matrix in ‘interdependence matrix’ which can determine the experiences that interdependent persons have through their interactions. The term outcome is stated as rewards received and costs incurred in the process of interaction. Rewards can be defined in terms of pleasure and satisfaction the person received in the relationship, while costs refer to factors that mentally and or physically inhibits or deters the performance of behaviors. (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978).

Individuals in the relationship are looking forward to rewards instead of costs. However it is not possible to always gain whatever they want. What they experience such as satisfaction, happiness, disappointment, and anger is determined by their interactions, which is reflected by varied scores written in the matrix.

Figure 3: The outcome matrix adapted from Kelly and Thibaut (1978:10)

		personA	
		a1	a2
personB	b1	6	0
	b2	4	2

Figure 3 shows what outcome matrix is in interdependence theory. The columns refer to the choices person A can choose and rows refer to the actions person B can choose. In this figure, the couple shares the same correspondence values which means they are concordant with each other in behavioral choice. It implicates that the concordant decision will lead to the maximum mutual satisfaction to both parties. While the discordant decision will trigger the unequal outcome such as person A scores 4 on action a2 which may indicate that he/she feels OK. However person B only gets 0 on action b1 which may be an indication of his/her dissatisfaction.

Thus what individual can gain from the relationship is dependent on what kind of choice they make in course of the interaction. In another word, they depends on each other mutually or unilaterally. When two persons in a relationship reach the state of mutual dependence, which is also called interdependence, each person will have mutual power over his/her partner. The degree and extent of this mutual power is determined by dependence level of the partner. (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978).

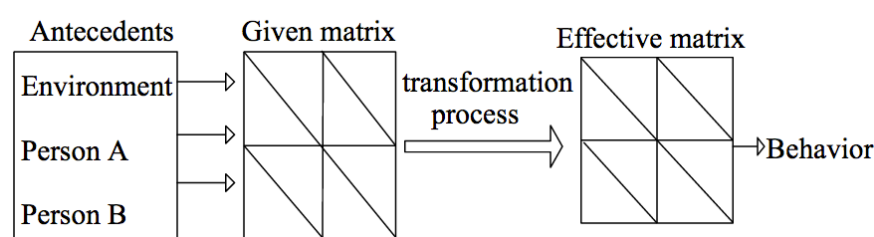
Dependence level refers to the degree of dependence of each person on their partner and the extent to which two partners' outcomes rely on interactions in the relationship (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978). In other words, the dependence level describes the extent to which each person's well-being rests on involvement in the relationship (Agnew, Rusbult, Van Lang, & Langston, 1998).

In conclusion, the mutual power over each partner is the basis to reach mutual satisfaction, and the dependence level is essential for personal well-being one may gain from the relationship. If the dependence level is high, the possibility of a relationship to

provide good outcomes will increase. While the dependence level is low, it is possible for persons in the relationship to gain poor outcomes and consequently to look for alternatives.

The interdependence theory also introduces a very important process, transformation process. This process helps to yield high and good outcomes by reformulating actions in given matrix to generate a new effective matrix, in which the behavioral choices can become relatively satisfied to both parties compared with the outcomes in the given matrix (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978).

Figure 4: The transformation process adapted from Kelly and Thibaut (1978:17)

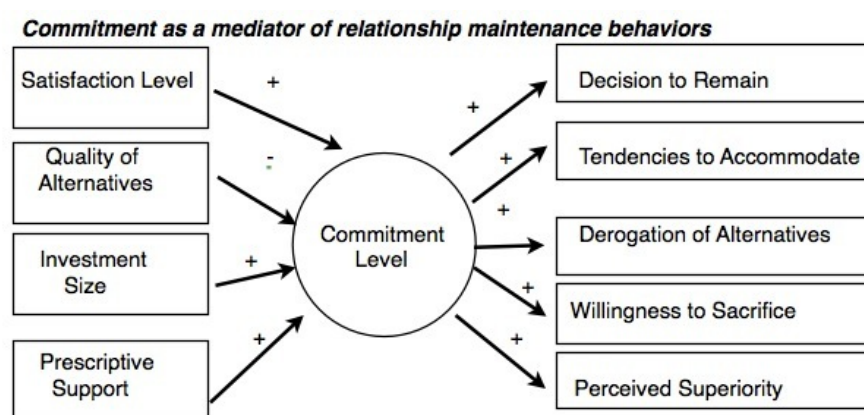


According to Kelly and Thibaut (1978), in given matrix, individual's behaviors are only decided by the giving environments and individuals' personal preferences, while the effective matrix refers to final determined behaviors shaped by broad considerations in transformation process. According to Agnew et al. (1998), these motivations can be strategic considerations, long-term goals, or desire to promote both one's own and partner's well-being. Transformation process describes movement away from desire of maximizing one's own immediate self-interest (MaxOwn) to either pro-relationship motivational shifts (MaxOther and MaxJoint) or anti-relationship shifts (MaxRel) (Agnew et al., 1998)

2.4 The investment model: a prolongation of interdependence theory

According to Rusbult (1983), the investment model extends interdependence theory in two respects. First, the investment model introduces a psychological experience, commitment, which generates from dependence. Second, three bases of dependence are identified which are satisfaction, quality of alternatives and investment size. Later, prescriptive support (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997) is proved to be the fourth variable of dependence.

Figure 5: The investment model adapted from Gaines and Agnew (2003:240)



In the investment model, commitment is introduced as a mediator of relationship maintenance behaviors (Gaines & Agnew, 2003), which is a subjective experience depending on individuals' daily experiences. It is one of the strongest predictors of relationship dissolution (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010).

In addition, commitment is defined in terms of three interrelated components including conative, cognitive, and affective properties (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001). It is an emergent property of dependence including psychological elements which the structural dependence cannot imply, thus it can represent more than the structural elements from which it raises (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Satisfaction level refers to the subjective evaluation of one's current romantic involvement (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007). The investment model states that the satisfaction level is positively associated with dependence (Gaines & Agnew, 2003), which means when satisfaction level is high, the degree of dependence and commitment will be high and vice versa. According to Rusbult and Buunk (1993), individuals feel more satisfied when their partners and relationships provide valued outcomes by fulfilling important needs, and when comparison level (CL) is low. Comparison level (CL) is an important terminology introduced in interdependence theory, which is "the standard against which the member evaluates the 'attractiveness' of the relationship or how satisfactory it is" (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959, p. 21). Individuals evaluate outcomes in a relationship, and consequently feel satisfied or dissatisfied, in light of their comparison level (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Quality of alternatives refers to the perceived desirability of the potential alternatives to one's relationship (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007). According to the investment model, commitment is negatively associated with quality of alternatives (Gaines & Agnew, 2003), which means that when individuals perceive alternatives as poor qualities, they tend to be more committed to their relationships.

The investment model extends interdependence theory by asserting the investment size can influence the commitment (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Invested resources can be both psychological experiences and real properties including time couples have spent together, sharing of emotional experience, joint friends and memories, offsprings, and ownership of various properties. These invested resources can be intrinsic to the relationship (e.g., time couples spent together, sharing of emotional experience), or extrinsic to the relationship, like joint friends and memories, offsprings, and ownership of

properties (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). In addition, efforts paid by couples in maintaining the relationship can be viewed as investment as well (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999).

According to Goodfriend and Agnew (2008), the intangible investments and planned investments are also robust predictors of key relational states and outcomes. Intangible investments refer to non-material resources that are either directly or indirectly tied to the relationship which can be either intrinsic or extrinsic, while the planned investments refer to the future investments couple have planned to put into their relationship (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008). Contrasting with common sense, intangible investments have more impact on individual's well-being compared with material investments (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Goodfriend and Agnew (2008) also argue that although none of planned investments have occurred yet, they still have strong influence on key relational states and outcomes.

In short, the size of investment in the relationship will intensify commitment by increasing the costs of ending the relationship, in that leaving may mean abandoning cumulative investment (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

The prescriptive support is the fourth antecedent of commitment. Prescriptive support (Cox et al., 1997) refers to the sense of obligation to remain with a partner including personal prescription and social prescription. The social prescriptive is found to be significantly associated with commitment in the research (Cox et al., 1997). Moreover, in another study (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007), the perceived social network marginalization is also proven to be a robust predictor of relationship commitment.

In short, individual tends to be more committed to the relationship when he/she perceives high satisfaction level, low alternatives' qualities, and the investment size is large, what's more his/her relationship is supported by their social networks.

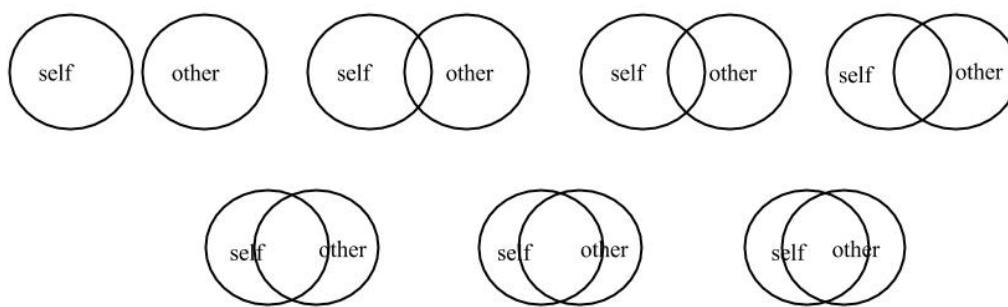
2.4.1 Commitment and cognitive interdependence

According to Agnew et al. (1998), cognitive interdependence is a concomitant of commitment which refers to a pluralistic, collective mental representation of the self-in-relationship with the tendency of partner-oriented and relationship-oriented thoughts, or thoughts relevant to MaxOther and MaxJoint motives. Commitment to a close relationship and cognitive interdependence are mutually influenced by each other in a way that earlier commitment predicts change over time in cognitive interdependence, and earlier cognitive interdependence predicts change over time in commitment (Agnew et al., 1998).

Commitment embodies 3 psychological components of self-in-relationship, conative, cognitive, and affective self-in-relationship. Conative self-in-relationship refers to intent to persist, which means individual is motivated to voluntarily continue the romantic relationship he/she is involved in. Cognitive self-in-relationship, which is also called future self-in-relationship, refers to long-term orientation. It indicates that one foresee long-term involvement in a relationship. While the affective self-in-relationship, which is also known as emotional self-in-relationship, is individuals' psychological attachment to the relationship. It states that one's emotional well-being is influenced by his/her partner and relationship. (Agnew et al., 1998). Thus, the term commitment refers to a subjective experience embodies three psychological elements of self-in-relationship which are intent of persist, long-term orientation and psychological attachment.

The commitment level can be measured. The Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale is designed to measure interpersonal interconnectedness, which is a set of seven Venn-like diagrams each representing different degrees of overlap of two circles. Those seven figures from which respondents choose one to best describe their close relationship, is constant in the total area and progressed linearly in the degree of overlap. (Aron.A., Aron.E.N., & Smollan, 1992).

Figure 6: The picture of Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale adapted from Aron et al. (1992:597)



“Sense of being interconnected with another” (Aron et al., 1992, p. 598) is measured in the IOS Scale. This interconnectedness provides evidence of the state of cognitive interdependence and commitment to the relationship, as Agnew et al. (1998) state, in an increasingly committed relationship, individual tends to think of their partner as part of the self and comes to regard himself/herself as part of a collective unit. Therefore, the IOS Scale can work as a measurement of self-perception of commitment to a close relationship by examining the perceived degree of interconnectedness.

2.4.2 Commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors

The investment model states that commitment as a subjective experience generates from dependence, which can promote the pro-relationship behaviors by disclosing the tendency of giving up personal preferences to gratify partners' and or relationships' well-being (Agnew et al., 1998; Gaines & Agnew, 2003).

According to Gaines and Agnew (2003), commitment level to a close relationship is positively associated with five relationship maintenance behaviors. These five behaviors are also called pro-relationship behaviors, which are decision to remain, derogation of alternatives, willingness to sacrifice, perceived superiority, and tendencies to accommodate. According to Le and Agnew (2003), commitment is a significant predictor of relationship dissolution which influences individual's decision to remain in a positive way that when the commitment level is high, individual will be eager to continue the relationship rather than leave and vice versa. Derogation of alternatives refers to the active devaluation of alternative partners (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). It indicates that individual tends to actively devalue the rewards and emphasize the costs of involvement with alternatives.

Willingness to sacrifice refers to individuals' active rejection of personal-welfare in order to fulfill the long-term relationship-welfare and or partner-welfare (Van Lange et al., 1997). It implies the tendency that individual gives up immediate personal well-being (e.g. a good job) to gratify the relationship well-being and or partner's well-being (e.g. staying with partner in same city, planning for a family).

Perceived superiority (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) refers to the tendency that individuals perceive their relationships as superior which is reflected in individuals' tendencies to hold more positive beliefs about their own relationships than about others'

relationships (positive superiority); and or to hold fewer negative beliefs about their own relationships than about others' relationships (negative superiority); also positive information dominated individuals' beliefs about their own relationships (own relationship positivity), whereas negative information looms large in beliefs about others' relationships (other relationship negativity).

Tendencies to accommodate refers to individuals' inhibition of negative emotions and impulse, and tendency of engaging in constructive and benign behaviors toward partners in dissatisfying situations (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). It claims that individuals will hold back their anger or criticism, and they will try to be tolerant when their partners' behaviors are poor. It implies the tendency that one considers the relationship-welfare as top priority when partner's behavior is mostly self-centered. The accommodation is lower when social concerns reduce and the degree of interdependence decreases (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). These social concerns can be concern of partners' feelings, future of the relationship and one's public image or self-concept (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Accommodation includes four types of response which are "exit", "voice", "loyalty", and "neglect" (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). This typology is based on the writings of Hirschman (1970) of three reactions to decline in formal organizations: "exit", "voice" and "loyalty". Rusbult and colleagues (1991) divide these four types of response into two dimensions which are constructiveness/destructiveness and activity/passivity. Constructiveness/destructiveness dimension refers to the response's impact on the relationship itself instead of effect on individual (Rusbult et al., 1991). The constructive response may promote the relationship, while the destructive response may potentially lead

to the relationship dissolution. The activity/passivity dimension refers to the response's impact on the problems couple is confronting, instead of the characteristic of behavior itself (Rusbult et al., 1991). It indicates that the active response may help to solve problems, while the passive response has no influence on problem resolution at all.

"Exit" as a destructive and active response, refers to the tendency of exhibition of one's dissatisfaction towards partner (i.e. individual's tendency to move away from the relationship). "Voice" as a constructive and active response, refers to positive communication with the partner in dissatisfying situation. "Loyalty" refers to a positive quietness during the dissatisfaction situation, which implicates the tendency of swallowing one's pride and keeping quiet. It is a constructive and passive response. "Neglect" is a destructive and passive response. One may tend to ignore partner, to reduce the time spent together, to treat partner poorly, or to passively wait for relationship dissolution. In short, accommodation is consisted of high level of "voice" and "loyalty" and low level of "exit" and "neglect". (Rusbult et al.,1991).

The investment model states that commitment is positively associated with relationship maintenance behaviors (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). This idea is examined in this study by revealing Finnish-Chinese couples' perceptions of commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors. The investment model forms the theoretical ground for the thematic analysis.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims and research questions

The purpose of this study is to test the investment model by examining whether commitment is positively associated with relationship maintenance behaviors in Finnish-Chinese couples. As it is stated in the investment model that high level of commitment promotes relationship maintenance behaviors (Gaines & Agnew, 2003), Finnish-Chinese couples' perceptions of commitment and their relationship maintenance behaviors are revealed and examined to achieve the study goal.

More specifically, the goal can be achieved by answering two questions:

RQ 1: How do Finnish-Chinese couples perceive their commitment level? How do the self-perceived commitment levels of Finnish and Chinese partners relate to one another?

The investment model states that commitment is associated with cognitive interdependence, a mental state characterized by a pluralistic and collective representation of self-in-relationship (Agnew et al., 1998). It refers to the tendency that individual prefers to consider oneself and one's partner as a unit. Therefore, this research question aims to discover the nature of Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment. Then through compare and contrast of the commitment levels of Finnish and Chinese partners, the similarity and or diversity may be discovered.

RQ 2: What maintenance behaviors are identified by Finnish-Chinese couples? How similar or dissimilar are the reported relationship maintenance behaviors of Finnish and Chinese partners?

The purpose of this research question is to investigate Finnish-Chinese couples' perceptions of important relationship maintenance behaviors. According to the investment model (Gaines & Agnew, 2003), five relationship maintenance behaviors are associated with commitment which are decision to remain, derogation of alternatives, willingness to sacrifice, perceived superiority and tendencies to accommodate. Similarity or dissimilarity in relationship maintenance behaviors of Finnish and Chinese partners may be discovered by examining interview data.

Results concerning of Finnish-Chinese couples' perceptions of commitment and their relationship maintenance behaviors will be revealed by these two questions, and whether Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment are associated with their relationship maintenance behaviors will be examined.

Interviews are semi-structured and open-ended questions are designed. Interviewees are able to express themselves deeply and thoroughly. As the interview questions concern privacies, all questions are well structured.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Qualitative research

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, which consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible, thus the qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

In addition, as the result of social development, individual may have multiple identities in different groups and various circumstances, which leads to an increase in sophisticated social relations. Therefore, nowadays it is important in scientific studies to focus on a specific social relation in a limited context and to discover and interpret the meanings of these phenomena naturally.

According to Flick (2006), the qualitative research is highly relevant to the study of social relations, owing to the increasing identities of the same person in different contexts, which he regards as “the pluralization of life worlds” (Flick 2006, p. 11). Thus, in a modern and post-modern society where pluralization of lifestyles and patterns of interpretation widely exist, in order to study people’s minds and behaviors in one specific social relation in a limited context, the locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives upon distinctive identities of interviewees are required to be collected (Flick, 2006). The qualitative research is able to satisfy this requirement, as Flick sentences in his book “Qualitative research is oriented towards analyzing concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity and starting from people’s expressions and activities in their local contexts” (Flick 2006, p. 31).

In short, the qualitative research is suitable for this study, as the study aims to reveal Finnish-Chinese couples’ perceptions of commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors in a Finnish context in order to examine whether the commitment is positively associated with relationship maintenance behaviors. The qualitative research is helpful to concentrate on revealing and making sense of those selected couples’ self-perceived commitment and their relationship maintenance behaviors.

Among various qualitative research methods, semi-structured interview with open-ended questions is applied. According to Cook (2008), in semi-structured interview, conversation oscillates among the researcher's introduction of the topic under investigation, the participant's account of his/her experiences, and the researcher's probing of these experiences for further information useful to the analysis. Therefore, the flexibility and control over the interview of semi-structured interview can help interviewer to obtain more useful information.

Although semi-structured interview with open-ended questions is more flexible than structured interview, it is still based on the use of an interview guide, which is a written list of questions and topics that is needed to be covered in a particular order (Bernard, 1988). This list helps interviewer to control the whole interview procedure. Open-ended questions ask respondents to use their own words in answering questions, and thus allow interviewees to respond with what is in their minds (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000).

Semi-structured interview with open-ended questions helps interviewer to control the interview, while giving interviewees enough flexibility to answer the questions as they want (Bernard, 1988). Moreover both interviewer and interviewees feel free to discuss about any emerging idea during the interview. This kind of interview may create a friendly atmosphere in which interviewees are more likely to relax themselves and interviewer may be able to collect rich and various information at the meanwhile.

As this study concerns interviewees' privacies, a relaxing and friendly atmosphere without any feeling of control and judgement is very essential. Moreover, to collect more valid information on interviewees' perceptions and ideas, the flexibility is critical as well.

Therefore, the semi-structured interview with open-ended questions is the most appropriate research method for this study.

3.2.2 Participants

Participants are selected under the following criteria: 1) living in Finland, 2) Couples consisting of one partner from Finnish culture and one partner from Chinese culture.

All interviewees are reached by the author's personal social network, and the amount of interviewees is decided by the availability of the resources on one hand, and by the nature of qualitative research on the other hand. Participants of semi-structured interview are encouraged and promoted to talk in depth about the topic under investigation (Cook, 2008). Thus, it can help interviewer to collect rich and various information from the in-depth interview which the quantitative research is not able to achieve.

Therefore, four intercultural couples in total of eight individuals join in this study. The interviewees' age are from 25 years old to 36 years old. The average age is 28 years old. Their relationships have been maintaining from 3 years up to 10 years. Three couples are engaged and one couple is married. Although the qualitative research method has been applied to collect in-depth information, the sample size is relatively small for a scientific research. This will be further discussed in evaluation section.

Table 1: Basic information of interviewees

Female	Male	Duration of relationships
Chinese(27)	Finn(25)	4 years
Chinese(34)	Finn(36)	10 years
Finn(25)	Chinese(25)	3 years
Finn(27)	Chinese(28)	4 years

3.2.3 Interview procedure

Interviewees' rights were clearly explained and the informed consents were signed before the interview. All interviewees permitted that their answers could be recorded, transcribed, analyzed and cited for the purpose of scientific research.

Interviews were conducted respectively so that each person could feel free to express his/her own opinions without potential bias and or influences from her/his partner. Three couples were interviewed face-to-face and one couple was interviewed via Skype due to their time schedule. To maintain interview in a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere, interviews for three couples were done in their living rooms. The familiar environment helped interviewees to talk more freely. Simple question relating to interviewees' basic information including age and duration of their relationships was asked at the beginning. It helped not only to sort data relatively easily but also to create a friendly relationship between interviewer and interviewees. Interview with open-ended questions allowed interviewees to express themselves freely. All questions had been written down

under the guidance of research questions before the interview, which created an important outline guiding the interview procedure.

Interviews were conducted in both Chinese and English. Chinese as the native language was preferred by Chinese participants, while English was used in interviewing Finns due to interviewer's lack of Finnish language skill. All the resources in Chinese were translated into English after transcription.

3.3 Data analysis

There are two parts of the collected data. First one is the transcribed data of interview recordings and the second part is the IOS Scale diagrams. All interviews last proximately 40 to 60 minutes and the transcriptions are approximately 50 pages of A4 paper. Because of the issue of confidentiality, anonymous interviews are conducted and all interviewees are labelled by several symbols to identify their nationalities and gender.

1)Capital letters “C” and “F” are used to identify interviewees’ nationalities. The former one refers to Chinese and the later one refers to Finnish.

2)Interviewees’ gender is labelled by small letter “m” referring to male, and “f” referring to female.

3)Couples are marked by numbers 1 to 4.

Table 2: Labels of interviewees.

1Cf	1Fm
2Cf	2Fm
3Ff	3Cm
4Ff	4Cm

In addition, thematic analysis is applied in this study. Thematic analysis is not a research method in itself but rather an analytic approach used as part of the meaning-making process (Lapadat, 2010). According to Boyatzis (1998, p. 4), “thematic analysis is a process to be used with qualitative information”, in which an explicit “code” is required. It focuses on encoding implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011).

A theoretical thematic analysis refers to a deductive approach to identify and analyze themes based on researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in a pa

rticular area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers may use their research questions, interview questions, or the theory-derived categories as a start list a priori themes for coding data documents (Lapadat, 2010). Deductive approach (Beiske, 2007) explores a known theory or phenomenon and tests if that theory is valid in a given circumstance. It follows the path of logic most closely (Snieder & Larner, 2009). This study applies deductive approach of thematic analysis to examine the investment model by revealing Finnish-Chinese couples' perceptions of commitment and their relationship maintenance behaviors. Although the deductive approach of thematic analysis builds on a

theory, it still retains the basic quality of qualitative research that of being able to produce unexpected results based on the particular data.

According to research questions, two categories are generated.

Category 1: Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment

This category focuses on revealing the nature of Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment. Four themes are generated: commitment level, intent to persist, long-term orientation and psychological attachment to the relationship. Further, when the motivation is examined, two new themes emerge which are pursuit of family and satisfaction towards partners. This is beyond anticipation.

Category 2: Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived relationship maintenance behaviors

This category discovers intercultural couples' relationship maintenance behaviors. Five themes are generated under the guidance of the investment model which are decision to remain, derogation of alternatives, willingness to sacrifice, perceived superiority, and tendencies to accommodate. Furthermore, when tendencies to accommodate is thoroughly examined, two key codes emerge: development and negotiation. This finding is unexpected.

The following table shows the total amount of instances of each theme and or code. The interview questions related to different categories are listed as well.

Table 3: Basic information related to research categories/themes/codes

Categories	Themes	Codes	Total amount of instances related to categories/themes/codes	Interview questions related to categories/themes/codes
Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment	Commitment level		8	10
	Intent to persist		8	11
	Long-term orientation		8	12
	Psychological attachment to the relationship		8	13
	Pursuit of family		5	11 & 12
	Satisfaction towards partners		8	11 & 12
Finnish-Chinese couples' relationship maintenance behaviors	Decision to remain		8	5
	Derogation of alternatives		2	8 & 9
	Willingness to sacrifice		8	3 and 4
	Perceived superiority		8	6 & 7
	Tendencies to accommodate	Development		3
Negotiation			7	

In addition, there are several new findings. 1) The result of IOS Scale may reflect the influence of cultural difference upon perceptions of commitment. 2) Finnish-Chinese couples' willingness to sacrifice are influenced by reward-cost frame. 3) Development and negotiation are two characteristics of Finnish-Chinese couples' communication in dissatisfying situations. In the following chapter, results obtained from data analysis are presented.

4 RESULTS

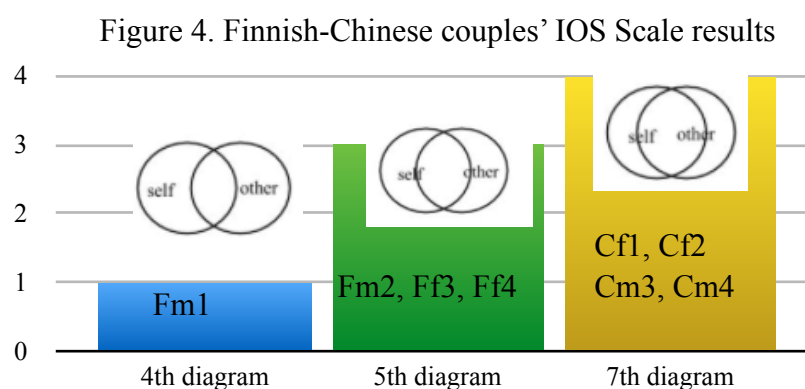
In this chapter, interview data is summarized. Main findings are presented in regard to Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment level and their relationship maintenance behaviors.

4.1 Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment level

Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment level is measured in two ways. First one is the IOS Scale. The other one is interview questions concerning of psychological experience of commitment.

Firstly, findings in IOS Scale are summarized. The data distributes to the fourth, the fifth and the seventh venn-like diagrams. No couple chooses the same diagram which implicates that all Finnish-Chinese couples have different self-perceived commitment level.

Figure 7: Finnish-Chinese couples' IOS Scale results



All Chinese interviewees choose the nearly-overlapping diagram. Some of them state that they consider their partners as part of their lives and or they are a special unit.

I love him so much and we would like to continue the relationship. That's why I am still [living] in Finland. I think we are becoming a unit [and] we don't want to leave each other.(1Cf)

We have been living together for 10 years, we understand each other. He has almost become part of my life.(2Cf)

I think we are a particular unit [in which we are] connecting to each other. We share same interests and same views. (4Cm)

Three Finns choose the fifth diagram and one interviewee choose the fourth diagram which is the half overlapping diagram.

Besides of IOS Scale, three interview questions concerning of three psychological components of commitment are asked. All interviewees claim that they do have psychological experience of commitment. All of them state that they would like to be voluntarily involved in their current relationships, and they do hold a long-term orientation toward their relationships as well. Moreover, interviewees' emotional well-being is influenced by the relationships and their partners.

Another two themes appear in this section, pursuit of family and satisfaction towards partners. Pursuit of family is important for many interviewees to be committed to their relationships.

I do have a strong belief that we will continue the relationship. We have talked about the future, family, and kids. It is really good that I would never give up [my relationship]. (1Cf)

If we love each other and we both want to be with each other. We share the same goal like having a good family.(1Fm)

We have discussed a lot about future. We would like to have a happy family. (3Ff)

Yes, we would continue the relationship, we would like to have a great family. (4 Ff)

In addition, interviewees are encouraged to persist in their relationships and to hold long-term orientation because of the satisfaction they have gained from partners.

Yes, I would like to continue because she is nice and I don't want to lose her. (1Fm)

He is good, he takes good care of me so that I would like to take care of him as well. He makes me feel like we could be together forever. He gives me confidence.(2Cf)

(...)He is a good person, he respects me very much, and I think the relationship is good and healthy so I would like to continue.(3Ff)

Both pursuit of family and satisfaction towards partners are important motivations for commitment.

Finnish-Chinese couples also believe that their personal well-being is influenced by their relationships and partners. Interviewees claim that if they quarrel with their partners, they will become upset. And if their relationships are good, they will feel happy.

Yes, I think it influences me. He makes me feel happy and safe. But if we fight, I feel upset. (1Cf)

Yes, definitely it is. It is fine to at home not fighting. It is quite easy to stay upset [if we fight]. [But] We don't fight that much. (2Fm)

Yes, if we are good then I feel happy, if we are fighting, then I feel sad.(3Ff)

The conflicts may cause negative emotions to influence Finnish-Chinese couples' emotional well-being.

4.2 Self-perceived relationship maintenance behaviors

In this part, findings regarding relationship maintenance behaviors are presented.

4.2.1 Decision to remain

All interviewees state that they would like to continue their relationships. Some of them emphasize the duration of their relationships to express the willingness to remain.

Yes, I will [remain], definitely. We have been together for 4 years, I want [the relationship] to be continued. (1Cf)

Yes, it has been 10 years already. (2Cf)

The time couples has been spent together is critical for interviewees to remain in their relationships.

In addition, some interviewees state that they would like to remain because of the satisfaction they have gained from their relationships and or from their partners.

Yes, of course, I will remain. We have a family now, so I don't think there is any reason to leave her.(2Fm)

Yes, I won't leave. He is good, and as I said before, the relationship is healthy and satisfied. (3Ff)

Yes, I definitely will [remain]. She is a nice girl and the relationship is good. (4Cm)

The satisfaction is considered to be essential for interviewees to remain in their relationships. Generally, it consists with the idea that when a relationship can yield good outcomes which cannot be satisfied by alternatives, individual will tend to stay rather than leave (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992).

4.2.2 Derogation of alternatives

Interviewees' devaluation of possible rewards and emphasis of negative costs of involvement with alternatives are found. It is a typical "sour grapes" attitude, in which the negative, cost-increasing aspects of interaction with alternatives will be exaggerated and the positive rewards will be diminished by individuals (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959).

Exaggeration of two negative aspects of involvement with alternatives are found, which are consumption of time and uncertainty of alternatives.

(...) But I don't think it is a good idea [to change a partner] because it costs a lot of time to get use to another person, and to adjust to new life style. We have spent 4 years to make everything work in our relationship, I don't want to spend another 4 years to do it again, and you can't even make sure it will work anyway.(1Cf)

(...) While I never think about to change a partner. It costs time [to develop a new relationship], and you can't make sure that person would be better than this one. (2Cf)

Consumption of time indicates extra investment in interaction with alternatives, just as one interviewee states “ it costs a lot of time to get use to another person”. While the uncertainty of alternatives refers to the phenomenon that interviewees question about alternatives' quality and the rewards one may receive from involvement with alternatives. On one hand interviewees maximize alternatives' withdrawals and on the other hand minimize their excellencies.

4.2.3 Willingness to sacrifice

Willingness to sacrifice refers to individual's overt and active rejection of some personal benefits (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Some interviewees hold the idea that they would like to give up personal well-being for their relationships in some cases. Some believe that whether to give up personal well-being depends on rewards and costs.

Three interviewees state that they would like to give up personal benefits for their relationship well-being.

Yes, if the situation were really serious, I would give up my personal benefits. When I finished my bachelor's study here, I got an offer in a famous university in Switzerland. I had considered for a long time and finally decided to stay in Finland. I did that only for my relationship.(1Cf)

(...) I got a job interview in Helsinki, but as my family's here and we were not possible to move to Helsinki, I finally gave up the opportunity.(2Cf)

Well, I think I will give up. We have talked a lot about our future, you know, about where to live, how to educate children and so on. And we have decided to move to China and live there someday in the future.(3Ff)

Their examples prove that they are willing to sacrifice one's immediate personal well-being for relationship benefits.

The rest of interviewees state that when the personal welfare is somehow against the relationship well-being, they prefer to discuss with their partners and make decision carefully to make sure that it will not do harm to their relationships. All of them claim that if the situation is bad, they will give up personal well-being.

Ah, I think we will talk first, to figure out what we can gain and what we will lose if I make the decision. If we could bear the lost, for example, living separately for a temporary period, then I think I will choose personal benefit. But if I would lose her to get my personal benefit, I would never do that. (1Fm)

I would consider a lot, and discuss with her, if we could go through the situation like we live separately for a long time. If it is really bad, I will not do that. (2Fm)

I think it is kind of my responsibility to make sure that we have a good life, so in some cases, my personal benefits are related with the relationship well-being, like a good job. So I will try to balance these two. But I will discuss with her as well.[...] If the cost is really high, if we may break up, I will give up my personal benefits. (3Cm)

Well, I think it is important to discuss with her first. If it is really important for me, and she could understand, I will probably choose personal benefit, but if it has a serious impact on our relationship, I will give up. (4Cm)

I think I will talk with him first. If we feel OK with it, like living in different cities for a period, I will probably choose personal benefits. But if the decision will badly hurt the relationship, I will probably give up [personal benefits]. (4Ff)

It seems that the willingness to sacrifice is driven by the reward-cost frame. The relationship dissolution is the bottom line for Finnish-Chinese couples to decide whether to gratify personal benefits or to satisfy relationship well-being.

4.2.4 Perceived superiority

Perceived superiority (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) refers to the tendency that individual perceives one's own relationship as superior. It states that individuals perceive more positive qualities and less negative qualities in their own relationships than others' relationships (Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). There are four tendencies of perceived

superiority which are positive superiority, negative superiority, own relationship positivity and other relationship negativity.

All interviewees consider their relationships as "good", "healthy" and "satisfying". No one describes the relationship negatively. When their relationships' shortcomings are asked, no one has given a detailed description. Most of them claim that although there are a few conflicts, their relationships are satisfying.

She's good, and our relationship's good. (...) Ah, the shortcoming, I don't really think it's shortcoming. I mean, every couple has problems, we have too, but we would like to solve problems, so I think our relationship is really good. (1Ff)

I think our relationship is good, I am satisfied. (...) Ah, there is nothing that I feel dissatisfied with. It is life, we may have conflicts sometimes, but everything is still fine. (2Cf)

This result may show that positive information dominated Finnish-Chinese couples' beliefs about their own relationships which is defined as own relationship positivity (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Besides, interviewees also believe that their romantic relationships are better and more satisfying than others'. It is similar to the idea that individuals tend to hold more positive beliefs about their own relationships than about others' relationships which is called positive superiority (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

(...) When I try to compare [with others], I feel the relationship I have now is really good. He is really good. He takes good care of me, whenever I go home late, he will call me. (1Cf)

Yes, whenever I talk with my friends, they will complain a lot about their relationships and their partners. I do feel that I have a great relationship. He respects me very much and would like to apologize to me if he did something wrong. I think the relationship is good and healthy which satisfies me. (3Ff)

As results show, Finnish-Chinese couples believe that their romantic relationships are healthy, good and satisfying. They also believe that their relationships are better than others'.

4.2.5 Tendencies to accommodate

Finnish-Chinese couples would like to communicate with their partners to confront bad times. All interviewees state that they would like either to talk with their partners or to keep quiet during conflicts.

To talk with partners equals to "voice", an active relationship constructive response (Rusbult et al., 1991). Seven interviewees claim that they would like to talk with their partners during conflicts in order to understand what happened and try to solve the problems.

We never avoid problems. Whenever we got problems, we would like to talk and solve it. He is such kind of person, he always says you must talk to me, otherwise we can't solve the problems.(...) Before, when he had bad mood I was easy to be angry and would fight back to him immediately. However, now I understand sometimes it is his personal way to go through bad time and I should not make things even worse. So I decide to respect him somehow. Now I would try to talk with him and keep calm.(1Cf)

I would like to talk with her and figure out what happened and try to solve the problems. (...) I guess that is the only way to solve problems.(1Fm)

I would like to hold back my anger and try to talk with him. I used to speak aloud toward him, but now I understand it is just his way to talk and communicate. So now I would try to talk the problems with him because I respect him and his way [of communication].(3Ff)

It depends on different situations, but usually I will talk with her and try to solve the problems. Sometimes I talk with her, sometimes I keep quiet, sometimes I just try to talk something else with her. (4Cm)

Finnish-Chinese couples consider talking as an effective strategy to go through bad times.

While "loyalty", a passive constructive response (Rusbult et al., 1991), was chosen by one interviewee to confront partner's bad behaviors as well.

I would like to keep quiet when he is in bad mood. I would like to give him time to calm down. (...) It was different before, I used to quarrel with him whenever we had conflicts.(2Cf)

When partners behave poorly, all interviewees would like to choose a response which can positively influence their relationships such as talking with partners or keeping quiet.

Two key codes regarding communication in dissatisfying situations emerge, which are development and negotiation.

4.2.6 Development

The change in communication behavior in dissatisfying situations from relationship-destructive response to relationship-constructive response is found in this study. Finnish-Chinese couples claim that at the beginning stage of their relationships, they are more likely to fight back to their partners in dissatisfying situations. As time goes by, their behavioral choice in terms of communication has developed from destructiveness like fighting back, to constructiveness such as keeping quiet or communicating with partners.

Before, when he had bad mood I was easy to be angry and would fight back to him immediately. However, now I understand sometimes it is his personal way to go through bad time and I should not make things even worse. So I decide to respect him somehow. Now I would try to talk with him and keep calm.(1Cf)

I would like to keep quiet when he is in bad mood. I would like to give him time to calm down. (...) It was different before, I used to quarrel with him whenever we had conflicts. (2Cf)

I would like to hold back my anger and try to talk with him. I used to speak aloud toward him, but now I understand it is just his way to talk and communicate. So now I would try to talk the problems with him because I respect him and his way [of communication].(3Ff)

It depends on different situations, but usually I will talk with her and try to solve the problems. (...) While we don't fight so much. At the beginning, I was easy to get angry and would quarrel with her, but now I prefer to keep quiet or talk with her when she has bad mood.(4Cm)

This development of communication behavior from destructiveness to constructiveness is an ongoing dynamic process from conflict to harmony that all couples have to go through.

4.2.7 Negotiation

Negotiation is a communication strategy that Finnish-Chinese couples use to resolve problems, to make decisions and to confront conflicts. Moreover, interviewees seem to believe that the awareness of cultural difference may motivate them to negotiate with each other.

There are conflicts and problems of course, every couple has conflicts. Maybe because of different cultures we have, sometimes we think in very different ways. But we never avoid problems, we will talk a lot and to solve problems. (1Cf)

(...) We got some problem before, but we tried to discuss a lot, and finally we solved it. We would like to discuss a lot [to solve the problems], because we know we are different. (1Fm)

When conflicts appear, we would try to talk what happened and what is the problem instead of fighting.(...) Because of the cultural differences, we talk a lot to understand each other and solve our problems. That works rather well.(3Cm)

Finnish-Chinese couples believe that the awareness of cultural difference can remind them of the difference between each other and lead to a deliberate negotiation instead of useless quarreling and fighting.

In addition, the conflicts and the difference may remind interviewees about the cultural difference in the first place.

We would like to negotiate a lot to understand each other. I think it is important because we come from different cultures.(...)whenever I feel the difference in minds, I would think about the cultural difference first. (3Ff)

The influence of cultural difference is exaggerated in this case. Obviously not all problems and conflicts are caused by cultural diversities. However, it is possible that Finnish-Chinese couples believe in that way as a result of the huge difference between their cultures.

5 DISCUSSION

In this section, the research questions are answered by analyzing and discussing the results from the last section.

5.1 Commitment level of Finnish-Chinese couples

The results of IOS Scale show an ascendant trend in overlap of self-other scale from half overlapping to nearly overlapping, which implicates that all interviewees perceive a relatively high level of interconnectedness with their partners. According to Agnew et al. (1998), the level of interconnectedness provides evidence for cognitive interdependence and commitment. Therefore, Finnish-Chinese couples perceive relatively high level of commitment to their romantic relationships. Interestingly, there is no pair choosing the same diagram which indicates that no Finnish-Chinese couple perceives the same level of commitment.

Several interviewees claim that they consider their partners as part of their lives and or they are a special unit. This idea reflects a pluralistic representation of self and other in a close relationship, which is an evidence of interconnectedness and cognitive interdependence (Aron et al., 1992). As introduced before, cognitive interdependence is a concomitant of commitment (Agnew et al., 1998), thus this pluralistic representation of self and other is an evidence of commitment as well. Therefore, the consideration of partners as part of one's life and the idea that couple is a special unit also prove that Finnish-Chinese couples perceive relatively high level of commitment.

Besides, interviewees' answers to three interview questions concerning of psychological experience of commitment also show that all Finnish-Chinese couples have

relatively high level of commitment. According to Rusbult and Buunk (1993), commitment is an emergent property of dependence including psychological elements which the structural dependence cannot imply. Psychological elements of commitment refers to intense of persistence, long-term orientation and partner's influence upon individual's emotional well-being (Rusbult et al., 1998). All interviewees claim that they are willing to voluntarily continue their relationships and foresee a long-term orientation. Moreover, their emotional well-being is influenced by their relationships and partners. These results show that Finnish-Chinese couples experience the psychological elements of commitment, which also prove that Finnish-Chinese couples have relatively high level of commitment.

All results prove that Finnish-Chinese couples have relatively high level of commitment. And according to investment model (Gaines & Agnew, 2003), the commitment level is positively associated with relationship maintenance behaviors. It means that if the commitment level is relatively high, individual is more likely to remain in the current relationship, to derogate alternatives, to be willing to sacrifice personal well being to fulfill the relationship well being, to perceive one's own relationship as superior, to accommodate in dissatisfying communication. Therefore, in order to examine whether this idea is true among Finnish-Chinese couples, their relationship maintenance behaviors will be revealed in 5.2 section.

In addition, two factors are found to be essential for Finnish-Chinese couples to be committed to their relationships, which are pursuit of family and satisfaction towards partners. These findings are beyond expectation.

Several interviewees claim that they have discussed a lot about their future and would like to become a family someday. Discussing about future and family may be

viewed as a high degree of self-disclosure. The information Finnish-Chinese couples exchanged about future and family is highly personal which will be exchanged only when the relationship becomes highly intimate. According to social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) the degree of self-disclosure determines the development of relationship and intimacy. Therefore, it is reasonable that Finnish-Chinese couples believe that discussing about future and family is essential for them to be committed to their relationships: their self-disclosure determines the development of their relationships and intimacy. What's more Finnish-Chinese couples' willingness to discussing about future and family may imply that their relationship have developed to the stable exchange stage. This is a highly intimate stage in which individuals can fully express their feelings on a broad range of topics (Chen & Starosta, 2005). At this stage, individuals become very intimate and able to understand each others even without speaking. Two partners become a joint unit sharing a large amount of information and keeping no secrets.

Besides, the willingness to become a family may be viewed as a kind of investment. According to the triangular theory (Sternberg, 1986), there are three components of love which are intimacy, passion and commitment. Passion component refers to the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation, and related phenomena in loving relationship; Intimacy component refers to feelings of closeness, connectedness, and boundedness; Commitment component refers to cognitive elements that are involved in decision making about the existence of and potential long-term commitment to a loving relationship. Different combinations of these components generate various types of love including nonlove, liking, infatuated love, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love and consummate love. (Sternberg, 1986).

“Family” that interviewees discuss about with their partners may be similar to consummate love which consists of intimacy, passion and commitment, or companionate love which consists of intimacy and commitment. To achieve consummate love or companionate love, individuals may put great efforts to maintain their romantic relationships because being intimated and committed to each other is not easy at all. And these efforts paid for maintaining the relationships are part and parcel of individuals’ overall investments (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Therefore, the pursuit of family may indicate that Finnish-Chinese couples are willing to put more efforts to achieve a better relationship outcome. This willingness may implicate that they have planned to invest more in their relationships in the future. According to Goodfriend and Agnew (2008), the investment that a person consciously intends to put into his/her relationship in the future is defined as planned investment. Thus, interviewees’ pursuit of family may be viewed as a kind of planned investment in a relationship. Moreover, Finnish-Chinese couples believe that this planned investment is essential for them to be committed to their relationships. This result consists with the idea that planned investment is positively associated with commitment (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008).

In addition, interviewees would like to give high evaluation to their partners. This high evaluation may be viewed as Finnish-Chinese couples’ admirations toward their partners and their relationships. According to Lehmiller and Agnew (2007), satisfaction level refers to the subjective evaluation of one’s current romantic involvement. Therefore, admirations of partners indicate that interviewees are satisfied with their partners and relationships. Moreover, according to the investment model (Gaines & Agnew, 2003) satisfaction level intensifies individual’s commitment level. Thus this result may indicate

that Finnish-Chinese couples' satisfaction towards their partners and their relationships is positively associated with their commitment level.

In conclusion, the pursuit of family includes discussing about future and family, and the willingness to become a family. Discussing about future and family may be an evidence of high degree of self-disclosure which determines the development of Finnish-Chinese couples' relationships. While the willingness to become a family is a kind of planned investment which can intensify their commitment level. Moreover, the satisfaction perceived by individuals motivates Finnish-Chinese couples to be committed to their relationships.

When results of IOS Scale are compared, an interesting phenomenon is discovered. All Chinese choose the seventh diagram which is the nearly overlapping diagram, while Finnish interviewees' answers distribute to the fourth and the fifth diagram.

This phenomenon may be a sign of cultural influence upon intercultural couples' perceptions of commitment. It may be caused by the difference in understanding and evaluation of self-other scale in Chinese and Finnish culture. An important dimension to distinguish cultures is autonomy versus embeddedness. According to Schwartz (2003), people in autonomy cultures are viewed as autonomous and bounded entities, while people in a culture with an emphasis on embeddedness are viewed as entities embedded in a collectivity. Therefore Chinese partners who come from a relatively collectivistic culture, may be more likely to choose nearly overlapping diagram because it is essential for them to view their partners as part of the unit and to hold a group orientation. While Finns with a relatively individualistic culture may be more likely to choose a diagram which has relatively lower degree of overlapping because independence is crucial for them, even

though the relationships are serious. However, this reasoning needs to be further examined with larger sample size to confirm.

In conclusion, the Finnish-Chinese couples in this study have relatively high level of commitment. All of them have experienced the psychological elements of commitment. The satisfaction gained from their partners and relationships and the pursuit of family motivate them to be committed to their relationships. Last but not least, the cultural difference may influence Finnish-Chinese couples' perceptions of commitment level. In the next section, Finnish-Chinese couples' relationship maintenance behaviors will be revealed in order to examine whether their commitment level is positively associated with their behaviors.

5.2 Relationship maintenance behaviors

Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived relationship maintenance behaviors are discussed in this part. The results prove that Finnish and Chinese partners' relationship maintenance behaviors are similar to each other. Both of them are willing to remain in their relationships, to derogate alternatives, to sacrifice personal well-being for relationship well-being, to perceive their relationship as superior and to accommodate when their partners behave poorly. Therefore, because Finnish-Chinese couples have relatively high level of commitment and they tend to behave benignly to maintain their relationships, it seems that Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment level is positively associated with their relationship maintenance behaviors.

Decision to remain

The result shows that Finnish-Chinese couples are willing to remain in their romantic relationships. The investment model (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992) states that when a relationship can yield good outcomes and or gratify one's important needs which cannot be satisfied by alternatives, individual will tend to stay rather than leave. Interview results consist with this idea. The satisfaction fulfilled by partners and relationships are emphasized by interviewees. Although the personal expectations are different, many of them show their willingness upon pursuit of family, a relatively intimate and committed close relationship.

Some interviewees emphasize the duration of relationship as a reason for their decision to remain. By doing that, interviewees imply how much time and efforts they have paid in developing their relationships. As stated before, the effort itself is a particular investment in a relationship (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Thus the emphasis of time can be viewed as the emphasis of investment in their relationships. This investment will intensify individual's commitment, and consequently promote relationship maintenance behaviors (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Le et al., 2010) .

In a word, all Finnish-Chinese couples in this study are willing to remain in their intercultural romantic relationships because the romantic relationships can satisfy their important needs in pursuing family. And the time and efforts they have paid to maintain their relationships also contribute to their decision to remain. This result seems to prove that Finnish-Chinese couples self-perceived commitment level is positively associated with their decision to remain.

Derogation of alternatives

According to Johnson and Rusbult (1989), derogation of alternatives refers to individual's active efforts at devaluing alternatives. The negative, cost-increasing aspects of interaction with alternatives will be exaggerated and the positive rewards will be diminished by individuals in this process (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959).

In this research, the so-called "sour grapes" attitude towards alternatives is found. Interviewees actively devalue the rewards by diminishing the potential alternatives' qualities and the satisfaction one may gain from involvement with alternatives. The emphasis upon uncertainty of alternatives is to deny the possibility that alternatives may be able to gratify the important needs. These "sour grapes" attitudes help individuals to keep away from alternatives.

The emphasis upon time consumption of being involved with alternatives is an emphasis on negative costs. Time in this context implies the efforts one will pay in maintaining a new relationship, which is a particular investment. Thus the emphasis of time consumption can be viewed as the emphasis on extra investment individual will have to put into involvement with alternatives in the future. Thus the consideration of high investment in interaction with alternatives will reduce individual's desire to be involved with alternatives.

In addition, according to social exchange theory, individuals constantly measure the rewards and costs, if the costs are greater than rewards they may tend to leave a relationship (Devito, 2007). Thus the "sour grapes" attitudes may actively help Finnish-Chinese couples to build a particular measurement system to weigh the rewards and costs of involving with alternatives. In this process the costs are exaggerated and the rewards are diminished. Thus the overweight negative costs and decreased positive rewards may keep

Finnish-Chinese couples away from alternatives. Although the idea may be illusion that involvement with alternatives gains less and loses more, it still has impact on Finnish-Chinese couples' decision upon derogation of alternatives. The power of reward-cost frame is strong even if it is illusion.

Therefore, the result shows that Finnish-Chinese couples in this study actively diminish the potential rewards and exaggerate the negative costs of being involved with alternatives, which indicates that Finnish-Chinese couples are actively derogating alternatives. Thus, their self-perceived commitment level seems to be positively associated with their derogation of alternatives. However, according to Drigotas and Rusbult (1992), commitment was found to be a partial mediator between derogation of alternatives and dependence. Therefore, this conclusion may need to be further examined.

Willingness to sacrifice

Willingness to sacrifice refers to individual's rejection of immediate self-interest to promote the relationship well-being (Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997). Interviewees' answers prove that when the decision may lead to relationship dissolution, they prefer to sacrifice personal benefits to gratify relationship well-being. Three examples also prove that Finnish-Chinese couples are willing to give up immediate personal well-being for relationship welfare.

Two interviewees claim that in order to stay with their partners, they actively gave up a better job in another city or a good offer from a famous university outside Finland in the past. Their examples consist with the important characteristic of willingness to sacrifice that individual's overt and active rejection of some personal benefits (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

The willingness to live in partner's home country is a kind of sacrifice as well. According to Van Lange and colleagues (1997), willingness to sacrifice has various forms from transient, situation-specific sacrifice (i.e., attend a play your partner wants to see) to more substantial, extended ones (e.g., agree to live in an undesirable locale for your partner's career). Therefore, interviewee's decision to move to partner's home country is a kind of sacrifice, as individual must give up all the familiar contexts. Moreover, all the established contacts, social networks, even family will be impacted by moving out. In addition, the unfamiliarity of the new context may cause various problems, such as frustration in professional development, inadaptation of life style and even lack of friends. Thus, the compromise of living in partner's home country is a kind of sacrifice, as individual rejected one's benefit to fulfill the relationship welfare (Rusbult & Buunk1993).

Besides, the reward-cost frame influences individuals' willingness to sacrifice. It may be because individuals try to minimize the costs and maximize the rewards through interactions to achieve mutual satisfaction in an interdependent relationship (Rusbult et al., 2001). Interviewees claim that they will discuss with their partners before making any important decision and if the cost of pursuing personal well-being is over the reward, and the cost is not acceptable to both parties, the long-term relationship welfare will be considered as the first priority. This is a typical behavior driven by reward-cost mechanism introduced in social exchange theory. According to Devito (2007), each person has its own comparison criteria to evaluate the rewards and costs, when the costs are bigger than rewards individual may tend to leave the relationship. In this case, Finnish-Chinese couples' decision making process is driven by the reward-cost frame in order to maximize the gains and minimize losses for both parties.

In short, Finnish-Chinese couples in this study would like to sacrifice personal well-being to fulfill the long-term relationship welfare. Moreover, Finnish-Chinese couples are willing to minimize the costs and maximize the rewards through interactions to achieve mutual satisfaction in an interdependent relationship (Rusbult et al., 2001). This result seems to prove that Finnish-Chinese couples self-perceived commitment level is positively associated with their willingness to sacrifice.

Perceived superiority

The Investment model (Gaines & Agnew, 2003) states that if couples have relatively high level of commitment, individuals will tend to perceive their relationships as superior.

The result proves that Finnish-Chinese couples perceive more positive qualities in their own relationships. This is known as own relationship positivity (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Interviewees insist that their relationships are “good”, “healthy” and “satisfying”. However, their relationships may or may not be as great as they believe. Whether it is reality or illusion, the perceived superiority may “feed back” on satisfaction which in turn enhances commitment (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

In addition, according to Van Lange and Rusbult (1995), individuals also tend to believe their relationships are more positive than others’ relationships. It means that individuals may think their relationships are better than others’, as said by one interviewee, “Yes, whenever I talk with my friends, they will complain a lot about their relationships and their partners. I do feel that I have a great relationship”. This perception is known as positive superiority (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). Both own

relationship positivity and positive superiority will make individual feel more satisfied with his/her own relationship and consequently may enhance the commitment.

In short, Finnish-Chinese couples in this study perceive their relationships as superior. They believe that their relationships possess more positive qualities and their relationships are better than others'. This result may prove that Finnish-Chinese couples self-perceived commitment level is positively associated with their perceived superiority. However, the association between commitment and perceived superiority has received the least empirical examination (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). Therefore, this conclusion still needs to be further examined in the future.

Tendencies to accommodate

Talking is the most common strategy for Finnish-Chinese couples to confront dissatisfying situations. All interviewees would like to hold back their anger and or swallow their pride when partners' behaviors are not satisfying.

The accommodation has four types of response which are categorized into two dimensions, constructiveness/destructiveness and activity/passivity. "Voice", which is an active constructive response, refers to actively and constructively attempting to improve conditions. It indicates that individual tends to communicate with partner to actively seek solutions instead of passively waiting for bad times go away. It can bring positive effects on solving problems. While "loyalty" refers to keep quiet in dissatisfying situations. It is a passive constructive response indicating that individual's behaviors cannot be helpful to the problem-solving process. (Rusbult et al., 1991).

Communication which is called "voice" in Rusbult's typology (Rusbults et al., 1982), is an important strategy for Finnish-Chinese couples to confront bad times. In their

opinions, communication can significantly help them to confront conflicts and to solve problems. One interviewee even states that “I guess that is the only way to solve problems”.

Intercultural couples consist of partners who possess divergent languages, beliefs, assumptions and values as a result of their socialization in different socio-cultural spaces (Karis & Killian, 2009). Thus they may have to confront more difficulties in maintaining their relationships due to the cultural diversities. It is important for intercultural couples to vocally express their feelings, to explain their behaviors, to actively show their understandings and supports to their partners. When they have problems, communication is the most efficient and effective way to reach mutual satisfaction.

On the other hand, one interviewee claims that she would like to keep quiet when her partner behaved poorly. This is a typical behavior of "loyalty". According to Rusbult et al. (1991), "Loyalty" cannot actively solve problems. However, to keep quiet during conflicts, individual may have to swallow one's pride. According to Rusbult and Buunk (1993), accommodation involves individuals' overt acceptance of some personal cost like swallowing one's pride for the relationship's well-being. Although keeping quiet cannot be helpful to the problem resolution, it can benefit the relationship by not to intensify the conflicts.

In addition, Gottman(1993a) proposes five marital types based on conflict behaviors, in which volatile, validating and conflict avoidant couples belong to the functional or stable type. Both volatile and validating couples are willing to communicate with each other in conflicts, the difference is volatile couples will fully express both positive and negative feelings while validating couples are more likely to communicate

moderately and to show their understandings and supports to partners. On the contrary, conflict-avoidant couples are not really like to discuss about problem and to solve it. Instead, they believe that the common ground and values they share overwhelm the differences between them, thus they would like to accept this differences and continue their relationship. (Gottman, 1993a).

How this three types of couples deal with conflicts may be similar to “voice” and “loyalty” typologies (Rusbults et al., 1982). Although the escalation and avoidance of conflict may hurt the marriage, both volatile and conflict avoidance couples maintain their relationships surprisingly well. It may because they can create their own rewards and costs systems and reach their own comfort level of emotional expression (Gottman, 1993b). Therefore, it is reasonable that both “voice” and “loyalty” are able to help Finnish-Chinese couples to deal with conflicts instead of being harmful to their relationships.

In contrast to the stereotype that Finns are quiet and do not like to communicate, all Finns in this study show their willingness to actively communicate with partners. In short, Finnish-Chinese couples are willing to benignly communicate with their partners and or keep quiet in dissatisfying situations. The combination of "voice" and "loyalty" strategies is also found. Whether to communicate with partner or to keep quiet depends on different situations. This result may prove that Finnish-Chinese couples self-perceived commitment is positively associated with their tendency to accommodate.

5.3 Characteristics of Finnish-Chinese couples' accommodation behaviors

Two key codes regarding Finnish-Chinese couples' communication in dissatisfying situations are found, which are development and negotiation.

Finnish-Chinese couples claim that at the beginning stage of their romantic relationships, they were more likely to fight back when they had conflicts. However, as time goes by, interviewees prefer to inhibit their anger rather than fight. This is a change in communication behavior from relationship destructive response to relationship constructive response over time.

Development is the nature of communication. Chen and Starosta (2005) state that communication is a developmental process which can never be absolutely complete or finished. Thus it becomes understandable that Finnish-Chinese couples' communication behaviors in dissatisfying situations have changed over time.

Besides, this development may be similar to the repair stage in Devito's model of relationship development. According to Devito (2004), there are six stages in relationship development. After intimacy stage, individuals in a relationship may experience the dissatisfying interactions at deterioration stage. Then they may go to repair stage, in which both parties may engage in intrapersonal and interpersonal repair in order to adjust to each other (Devito, 2004). Thus, the development of Finnish-Chinese couples' communication from fighting back to inhibit one's anger may be the result of repair. They experience the dissatisfying interactions, and then figure out a better way to solve problems and to keep their relationship healthy, which is being patient and moderate instead of being aggressive and angry.

Furthermore, this development of Finnish-Chinese couples' communication in dissatisfying situations from destructiveness to constructiveness may also prove that commitment is associated with relationship maintenance behaviors. As the duration of relationship increases, the time and efforts individuals have paid in maintaining their

relationships may increase. This increase in investment size is positively associated with commitment level (Rusbult et al.,1983). It indicates that Finnish-Chinese couples' commitment level will be enhanced as the investment size increases. Moreover, the high level of commitment will further promote the relationship maintenance behaviors (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). Thus, as time goes by, the enhanced commitment level of Finnish-Chinese couples will promote all relationship maintenance behaviors including accommodation behaviors. Thus, the development from destructive response to constructive response may prove that the commitment is positively associated with relationship maintenance behaviors.

To sum up, the development of Finnish-Chinese couples' communication behaviors in dissatisfying situations from destructiveness to constructiveness is the nature of communication. What's more, this development may also be the result of "repair" introduced in Devito's (2004) relationship development model. In addition, it may also prove that Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment is associated with relationship maintenance behaviors.

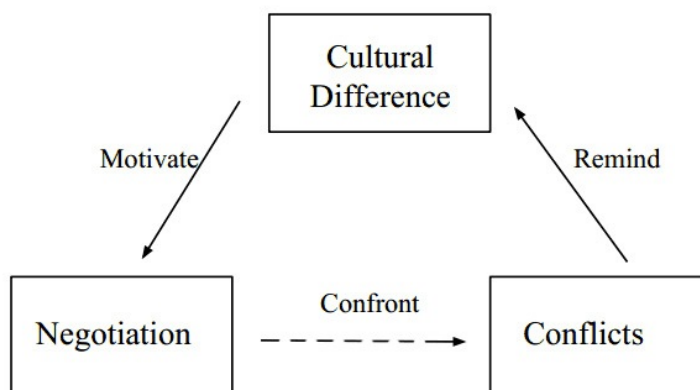
According to Rusbult et al. (1991), discussing problems, suggesting solutions, changing oneself, and urging one's partner to change all belong to "voice". As the result shows, Finnish-Chinese couples view communication as an essential way to confront conflicts. Moreover, interviewees believe that because of the awareness of cultural difference, they are more likely to negotiate rather than fight back when they have conflicts.

In addition, one interviewee states that the difference between she and her partner and or the conflicts will remind her of the cultural difference in the first place.

We would like to negotiate a lot to understand each other. I think it is important because we come from different cultures.(...)whenever I feel the difference in minds, I would think about the cultural difference first. (3Ff)

Not all conflicts emerging in an intercultural romantic relationship are caused by cultural difference. The cultural difference is exaggerated in this case. However, as a result of the cultural difference, Finnish-Chinese couples do face some particular problems which intracultural couples may not experience. Thus, it is possible that conflicts remind of the cultural difference in the first place and the awareness of the cultural difference motivates Finnish-Chinese couples to negotiate in order to confront conflicts. However, negotiation cannot solve all conflicts. Quarrels and fights are not avoidable sometimes. The idea that negotiation can help to confront conflicts may be a mix of both reality and illusion.

Figure 8: The relationship among cultural difference, negotiation and conflicts



In short, Finnish-Chinese couples would like to negotiate with their partners to confront conflicts. In some cases, Finnish-Chinese couples believe that conflicts will remind of cultural difference, and the awareness of cultural difference motivates them to

negotiate, and then negotiation helps to confront conflicts. This idea may be a mix of both reality and illusion.

5.4 Conclusion

The analysis in this section discovers that Finnish-Chinese couples have relatively high level of commitment and their relationship maintenance behaviors are similar to each other. All Finnish and Chinese partners tend to behave positively and benignly to maintain their relationships healthily and smoothly. This result consists with the idea introduced in the investment model that if the commitment level is high, individuals are more likely to behavior positively to maintain their relationships (Gaines & Agnew, 2003).

The satisfaction gained from the relationships and partners is the main reason for Finnish-Chinese couples to be committed to their relationships. This result consists with the idea that satisfaction enhances individuals' commitment level (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). In addition, the pursuit of family is another essential reason for interviewees to be committed to their relationships. The pursuit of family includes discussing about future and family, and the willingness to become a family. Discussing about future and family may be an evidence of high degree of self-disclosure which determines the development of Finnish-Chinese couples' relationships and their intimacy level. While the willingness to become a family is a kind of planned investment which may intensify the commitment level.

In addition all interviewees are willing to be voluntarily involved in their romantic relationships, as their important need of pursuing family is gratified by their relationships. Besides, the active avoidance of involvement with alternatives is found among Finnish-

Chinese couples. Moreover, Finnish-Chinese couples are willing to sacrifice personal well-being for relationship well-being. The willingness to sacrifice is also driven by the reward-cost frame. In addition, they perceive their own relationships as superior. Last but not the least, communication is the most useful strategy for Finnish-Chinese couples to confront dissatisfying situations.

Two characteristics of Finnish-Chinese couples' communication in dissatisfying situations are discovered. 1) Finnish-Chinese couples' communication in dissatisfying situations developed from destructiveness to constructiveness. 2) Finnish-Chinese couples believe that they are more likely to negotiate with each other to confront conflicts due to their awareness of cultural differences.

6 CONCLUSION

This study shows that Finnish-Chinese couples have relatively high level of commitment. They tend to remain in their relationships, to actively derogate alternatives, to sacrifice self-welfare for gratifying relationship well-being, to perceive their relationships as good and healthy and to choose relationship constructive responses in dissatisfying situations. Therefore, as Finnish-Chinese couples have relatively high level of commitment and they tend to behave benignly to maintain their relationships, it seems that Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment level is positively associated with their relationship maintenance behaviors. Moreover, the result of IOS Scale may reflect the influence of cultural difference upon perceptions of commitment.

The result of IOS Scale shows that Finnish-Chinese couples perceive relatively high interconnection with their partners which, according to Agnew et al. (1998), can provide evidence of the state of cognitive interdependence. Moreover, all interviewees are willing to be voluntarily involved in their relationships and to foresee a long-term orientation. And their personal well-being is influenced by their relationships and partners. According to the investment model (Agnew et al., 1998), intent to persist, long-term orientation and psychological attachment are psychological experiences of commitment. Therefore, these two results prove that Finnish-Chinese couples have relatively high level of commitment and interdependence.

The satisfaction gained from the relationships and partners is the main reason for Finnish-Chinese couples to be committed to their relationships. This result consists with the idea that satisfaction enhances individuals' commitment level (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). In addition, the pursuit of family is another essential reason for interviewees to be

committed to their relationships. The pursuit of family includes discussing about future and family, and the willingness to become a family. Discussing about future and family may be an evidence of high degree of self-disclosure which determines the development of Finnish-Chinese couples' relationships and their intimacy level. Moreover, the willingness to become a family indicates that Finnish-Chinese couples' willingness of future investment in their relationships which is called planned investment. This result consists with the idea that the planned investment is positively associated with commitment (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008). These two findings are beyond anticipation.

According to the investment model (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992), when a relationship can yield good outcomes and or gratify one's important needs which cannot be satisfied by alternatives, individual tends to stay rather than leave. Therefore, as the essential need upon pursuit of intimate and committed relationship is gratified, Finnish-Chinese couples are willing to be voluntarily involved in their romantic relationships rather than leave. Moreover, the Finnish-Chinese couples believe that time and efforts paid in maintaining their relationships is an important reason for their decision to remain. It consists with the idea that investment size will intensify the commitment level (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). In short, Finnish-Chinese couples tend to remain in their current relationships rather than leave, which consists with the idea that individual with high commitment level tends to stay rather than leave (Gaines & Agnew, 2003).

Besides, Finnish-Chinese couples have the typical behaviors of derogation of alternatives. They exaggerate the costs of involvement with alternatives and devalue the potential rewards one may receive. This result may prove the idea that individual with high level of commitment will tend to derogate alternatives (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989).

However, according to Drigotas and Rusbult (1992), commitment was found to be a partial mediator between derogation of alternatives and dependence. Therefore, this conclusion may need to be further examined in the future.

Results prove that Finnish-Chinese couples are willing to actively give up personal well-being to fulfill relationship well-being in some cases. Moreover, the willingness to sacrifice is driven by the reward-cost frame, which consists with the idea that individuals try to minimize the costs and maximize the rewards through interactions to achieve mutual satisfaction in an interdependent relationship (Rusbult et al., 2001). According to interviewees, if the cost of gratifying personal well-being is too high (i.e. relationship dissolution and or partners' dissatisfaction), they will give up personal welfare and gratify the relationship well-being. This result may prove that if a person has relatively high level of commitment, he/she will be willing to sacrifice personal well-being to fulfill relationship well-being (Van Lange et al., 1997).

Finnish-Chinese couples perceive more positive qualities than negative qualities in their own relationships, and they believe that their relationships are better than others'. This consists with the idea of own relationship positivity and positive superiority (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). This result may prove the idea that individual with high level of commitment will tend to perceive his/her relationship as superior (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). However, the association between commitment and perceived superiority has received the least empirical examination (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). Therefore, this conclusion may need to be further examined in the future.

Finnish-Chinese couples prefer to communicate with their partners and or keep silent during dissatisfying situations. This result reveals the fact that Finnish-Chinese

couples tend to choose relationship constructive behaviors "voice" and "loyalty" (Rusbult et al., 1991) in dissatisfying situations. Finns show their willingness to communicate in such situation which is against the stereotype that Finns are relatively quiet and dislike to talk. This result proves the idea that individual with high level of commitment will tend to accommodate in dissatisfying situations (Gaines & Agnew, 2003).

In addition, two key codes regarding Finnish-Chinese couples' communication in dissatisfying situations are found ,which are development and negotiation. This is beyond expectation.

Finnish-Chinese couples' accommodation behaviors in dissatisfying situations change from destructive response to constructive response, as the duration of relationship increases. It is the nature of communication which is an ongoing developmental process that can be never absolutely complete or finished (Chen & Starosta, 2005); What's more, this development may also be the result of "repair" introduced in Devito's (2004) relationship development model. In addition this development may also prove that commitment is associated with relationship maintenance behaviors. According to Wieselquist et al. (1999), efforts one has paid in developing a close relationship are part of individuals' investments. Therefore, as the duration of relationship increases, the time and efforts Finnish-Chinese couples have paid in maintaining their relationships increase as well. As a result, the increased investment size will enhance the commitment level, and the enhanced commitment will further promote the relationship maintenance behaviors (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). Thus, this development from destructive response to constructive response may be able to prove that Finnish-Chinese couples' self-perceived commitment is associated with relationships maintenance behaviors.

In addition, Finnish-Chinese couples believe that negotiations can help them to confront conflicts. In some cases, Finnish-Chinese couples believe that conflicts will remind them the cultural difference, and the awareness of cultural difference motivates them to negotiate, and then to confront conflicts. This idea may be a mix of both reality and illusion.

7 FINAL WORDS

7.1 Evaluation

The restricted resources is a limitation of this study. In order to discover individuals' experience in a specific context (Flick, 2006), four Finnish-Chinese couples are selected under 2 rules: 1) they have to live in Finland, 2) they have to consist of one partner from Finnish culture and one partner from Chinese culture. Although the semi-structured interview with open-ended questions is applied in order to collect in-depth information, the sample size is relatively small. As all interviewees were reached by my personal social network, it became relatively difficult to find a large amount of Finnish-Chinese couples who would like to participate in this study. Although all interviewees were interviewed respectively, the sample size is small for a scientific research. Fortunately, the qualitative research approach helped to collect more various data than expectation. Participants of semi-structured interview are encouraged and promoted to talk in depth about the topic under investigation (Cook, 2008). What's more, open-ended questions allow interviewees to respond with what is in their minds (Frey et al., 2000). It can give enough flexibility for interviewees to reply the questions as they want (Bernard, 1988).

Another limitation of this study is the lack of supporting literatures. The investment model has been applied in many interpersonal relationship studies but rarely in an intercultural context. As a result, there is few literature I can refer to.

In addition, the interviewer's personal characteristic is a double-edged sword. As a Chinese myself, it is relatively easier for me to communicate with Chinese and to understand them. In fact, many new topics containing unexpected in-depth information emerged during interviews which helped me to collect more valid data from Chinese

interviewees. However, My identity may also have impact on interviewees' answers. According to Frey et al. (2000), a researcher's particular characteristics may influence interviewees' behavior such as gender, age, race identity and so on. In this study, it is possible that interviewees may be influenced by my identity and to change their answers during interviews. Besides this, I may also interpret interviewees' answers in an inappropriate way. This is called observer bias which occurs when researcher's knowledge of the research such as the research purpose and or hypotheses influences their observations and interpretations (Frey et al, 2000).

Moreover, the lack of language skill may be criticized. As this study focuses on personal feelings, behaviors and privacies, how to ask questions during interview is very essential for collecting information. The use of a non-native language to interview Finns may make the interviewer ask questions in an improper way on one hand, and on the other hand it may decrease interviewees' enthusiasm of disclosing themselves as a second language cannot depict their feelings precisely in some cases.

7.2 Future work

In the future, the influence of cultural difference upon individuals' perceptions of commitment deserves more examination. In this study, the result of IOS Scale shows that all Chinese choose the nearly overlapping diagram while Finns' choices distribute into the fourth and the fifth diagram. This outcome may reflect that cultural difference has influenced individuals' perceptions of commitment. More researches with larger sample size are needed to make the conclusion more confirmative. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods may be more effective and efficient.

All Finnish-Chinese couples in this study have relatively stable relationships. This may be a reason that all interviewees have relatively high level of commitment and similar relationship maintenance behaviors. In future, more couples whose relationships are in various stages should be invited to join the study.

In addition, the association between commitment and derogation of alternatives and perceived superiority should be further examined. Moreover, according to the investment model (Gaines & Agnew, 2003), there are four antecedents of commitment level, which are satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, investment size and prescriptive support. Whether these four antecedents can influence intercultural couples' commitment level should be examined in the future.

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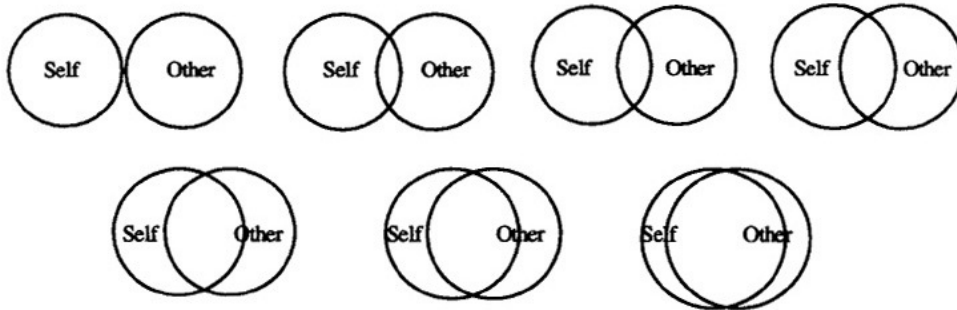
9 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview questions

Could you please tell me your age, and how long have you been together with your partner?

- 1) What would you tend to do in most cases when your partner behave poorly towards you? For example, when your partner had bad mood for some reason you didn't know, what would you like to do? And what about conflicts?
- 2) What influence you to behave in that way?
- 3) What would you like to do if your personal benefits is somehow contrasts with your relationship benefits? Could you please give me an example?
- 4) If you would like to give up your personal benefits for your relationship, why would you like to do that?
- 5) Would you like to remain in your relationship? Why?
- 6) Could you please evaluate your relationship.
- 7) Have you ever discuss with your friends about relationships? How do you think about others' relationship comparing with yours?
- 8) Could you please evaluate your partner? What is his/her strong point and weak point, compared with other male/female friends?
- 9) What do you think about alternatives? Do you think it worths to be involved in alternatives compared with your current partner? Why?
- 10) Please describe your relationship by selecting one of those 7 pictures.

Please circle the picture below which best describes your relationship



11) Would you like to continue your relationship? What makes you to continue this relationship?

12) Do you think this relationship could last for a long time? Could you please tell me why you believe that?

13) How does the relationship and your partner influence you and your personal well-being? Could you please give me an example.

Appendix 2: Schwartz co-plot map

Figure 3. CO-PLOT MAP OF 67 NATIONAL GROUPS ON SEVEN CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS

