

Santa Stopniece

Finnish-Chinese Intercultural Negotiation:
Power Positioning and Search
for Common Ground



JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN HUMANITIES 337

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ABSTRACT

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'Rising China' is a term that has come to refer to China's march to being number one, the speed of its economic growth, and its investment around the world during last two decades. In Finland, government agencies have been established to promote investment, trade, and co-operation with China, while regional and local governments are also actively involved. Meanwhile, much of the world is now competing for the attention of China, so the power dynamic is tending to shift in favour of the Chinese. This developing context has been examined in previous studies primarily from the perspectives of politics, economics, and management studies.

The overarching aim of this study is to investigate emerging power relations between Finns as sellers of investment opportunities and products and Chinese as investors, buyers, and partners. The study predominantly builds on Positioning Theory (Harré, 1991). It uses methodological tools of ethnographically framed interviewing and observation.

The study comprises five articles - empirical research reports exploring the major themes in data collected - adjustment of Finns to the Chinese, search of common ground with Chinese representatives, guest-host positioning during delegation visits, humor in negotiations, and the language aspect in co-operation. Five styles of positioning regarding power and common ground were found - adjustment, use of existing common ground, autonomy, 'soft' power, and pressure / hedging; the character this typology was found to correspond to phases of the five Chinese elements (*Wu Xing*). While the data suggest that both Finnish and Chinese representatives use all of these strategies, Finnish representatives tended to rely on active responses such as adjustment and pressure/hedging, while Chinese representatives more often resorted to a stance of autonomy. The dynamic among these phases is illustrated using the model of a rope, which suggests the integral nature of change from one style into another, as well as the ways power, common ground, and culture are all intertwined. A variety of external and internal factors that influence the positioning of Finnish and Chinese representatives could also be traced from the articles, such as organizational roles, meeting places, discourses about national characteristics, and considerations of 'face'. This further reveals the complexity of positioning regarding power and common ground.

Keywords: Chinese investments, Finland, co-operation, trade, intercultural communication, common ground, cultural adjustment, power, positioning, rising China, guest-host

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I am writing this foreword while hiding from my children in my mother-in-law's room, while my husband watches the kids for a few hours. This room has been one of the protected spaces where I have sought to concentrate more deeply on this dissertation. At other times, I worked at my husband's office, a nearby KFC or Starbucks, and a community library. Perhaps the best solution of all came when I obtained my own office at Xi'an Jiaotong – Liverpool University; at times, I felt that I could soar to theoretical heights, enjoying the eagle's-eye view and seeing the broader connections between my findings and other models. In any case, this work has now drawn to a close, and I would like to recognize those who have made it possible.

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tion and management to students of industrial design and business. With the dissertation finished, I hope to contribute to teaching even more.

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This thesis is for my grandmother, Daina Aizupe (1930–2011), who was a primary school teacher and taught me to read at the age of five. She had a remarkable talent for teaching preschoolers to read, achieving success in even very difficult cases. For this gift, she was well-known in the region, and many parents sought help and private lessons with her. My grandma always encouraged me to pursue ambitious goals in higher education and was thrilled when I shared with her my idea of doing PhD studies. Currently, while living in a jungle of concrete and 'people mountain, people seas' in China, I often retreat to the memories of summers spent in the Latvian countryside with my grandparents, with wide fields, open spaces, and closeness to nature.

Suzhou, November 2, 2017
Santa Stopniece

LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

- I. Stopniece, Santa. (2017b). "The Chinese will not change; we have to change:" adjustment of the Finns to the Chinese in a Chinese investment facilitation context. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 44 (July). Open access: <https://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr44/stopniece.html>
- II. Stopniece, S. (2015). China-Finland co-operation, trade, and investment: in search of common ground. *Journal of China and International Relations*, 3(1), 130-150.
- III. Stopniece, Santa. (2017a). Chinese "enormous hospitality" vs. Finnish "meeting among friends": guest-host positioning in China Finland delegation visits. In F. Dervin & R. Machart (Eds.), *Intercultural communication with China*, 145-163. Singapore: Springer.
- IV. Stopniece, S. (2016a). The simple and the complex nature of humor and laughter in Chinese-Finnish negotiations. *A Nordic Journal on Asia by early career researchers "Asia in Focus,"* 3, 26-36.
- V. Stopniece, Santa. (2016b). Language as a site of search for common ground and power positioning in Chinese-Finnish investment facilitation. Paper presented at the 10th China Goes Global conference, 26-28 July, Macerata, Italy.

FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Generating and overcoming cycles of five phases of Wu Xing and approaches to power and common ground	68
FIGURE 2	Rope model of interchange of responses regarding power positioning and common ground	71
FIGURE 3	Use of existing common ground as illustrated by Chinese knot (Kuo & Chew, 2011).....	71

TABLES

TABLE 1	Brief contents of delegation visits observed.....	31
TABLE 2	Interviewee codes and basic data	34
TABLE 3	Main segments and questions of interviews.....	35
TABLE 4	Main contribution of dissertation articles to understanding power and common ground.....	62
TABLE 5	Examples of approaches regarding power and common ground from articles	63
TABLE 6	Continuum of responses regarding power and common ground and their characterization	65
TABLE 7	Phases of Wu Xing generating cycle applied to power and common ground and examples	69
TABLE 8	Phases of Wu Xing overcoming cycle applied to power and common ground and examples	70
TABLE 9	Lists of main factors affecting positioning regarding power and common ground	74

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

FIGURES AND TABLES

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	13
1.1	Background of the study	13
1.2	Key concepts of the study.....	16
1.3	Aims and research questions	18
1.4	The structure of the compilation	19
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD	21
2.1	Dominant perspectives in research on business communication with China.....	21
2.2	Ethnography of communication as a perspective.....	25
2.3	Theories used in research articles.....	27
2.4	Observation	31
2.5	Interviews	34
2.6	Data analysis.....	37
2.7	Ethical considerations	39
3	SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLES.....	42
3.1	Description of general context regarding Chinese-Finnish co-operation.....	42
3.2	"The Chinese will not change, we have to change:" adjustment of the Finns to the Chinese in a Chinese investment facilitation context	44
3.3	China Finland co-operation, trade and investment: in search of common ground.....	47
3.4	Chinese 'enormous hospitality' versus Finnish 'meeting among friends:' guest-host positioning in China Finland delegation visits .	51
3.5	The simple and the complex nature of humor and laughter in Chinese-Finnish negotiations.....	55
3.6	Language as a site of search for common ground and power positioning in Chinese-Finnish investment facilitation	57

4	SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS: INTERTWINING OF POWER POSITIONING AND SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IN CHINESE-FINNISH NEGOTIATION.....	61
5	DISCUSSION	75
	5.1 Aims revisited and key findings	75
	5.2 Theoretical implications.....	77
	5.3 Practical implications	79
	5.4 Limitations.....	83
	5.5 Recommendations for further research.....	86
	5.6 Final remarks.....	87
	SUMMARY	89
	REFERENCES.....	96

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Rising China or *China's rise* are terms that refer to China's ascent to a dominant global role, the speed of its economic growth, and its growing investment around the world over last two decades. Before that time, most partnerships between China and the rest of the world took place in mainland China; most studies of partnership co-ordination between Chinese and non-Chinese partners have addressed this direction of investment (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2010) and focused mainly on economic and political factors. China's economic development has inspired and informed a proliferating scholarship on the implications for potential global power transitions, recognizing that China's unprecedented economic rise in the last 30 years is creating the conditions for an inevitable process of power diffusion (Schweller & Pu, 2011).

The process of cultural adjustment to Chinese norms has been predominantly studied in relation to the expatriate experience in China (Selmer, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2014). At times, this literature has involved a 'traditional "foreign-expatriate-in-China" complex, viewing China and the Chinese as "them" who need to be motivated, educated, managed and controlled by "we"' (Fang, 2012a, p. 969). As investments increasingly flow in the opposite direction, people in so-called Western nations are more often taking the position of 'sellers', offering opportunities to Chinese investors or trying to gain a foothold in the huge Chinese market. These changes in power dynamics make intercultural communication between the Chinese and their international partners an interesting and important topic to study.

Interest in attracting Chinese investment has increased in Europe since the global financial crisis of 2007–2008. For a long time, Europeans have headed to China as buyers, clients, or investors, but nowadays the picture is more complicated and the roles are often reversed. Investment promotion agencies compete for Chinese investment and adopt various incentive schemes (Schüler-Zhou *et al.*, 2012). At the end of 2014, China became the largest investor in the world,

although the EU received only 8% of total Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI), and the share for the Nordic countries was even smaller (Kalendiene *et al.*, 2017). Chinese investment in Europe began about 2002 and grew by 177% of annual rate in 2014, reaching an all-time high of USD 20.170 million (Casaburi, 2016).

The Baltic Sea region has not been a major destination for Chinese investments to date; however, the region is connected to China through the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road initiatives, and its economic co-operation with China is growing rapidly. In recent years, Chinese companies have started investing in the Nordic firms, for instance, there was acquisition of Volvo auto manufacturing by Zhejiang Geely in 2010, which opened the Chinese market to Volvo (Larçon & Brunstad, 2017) while also facilitating technology sharing with the parent company. Seven sectors – energy, real estate, manufacturing, agriculture, finance, telecommunications, and transportation – account for 95% of investment in the Nordic countries. The shift from manufacturing to services has intensified, and these changes have helped Nordic countries to attract growing FDI since 2010 (Kalendiene *et al.*, 2017).

Finland has established government agencies to encourage Chinese investment and has ensured the co-operation of regional and local governments in the related framework activities, such as town twinning. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland released the China Action Plan in 2010, recognizing the role of China on the international scene and listing priority areas for co-operation. Finland is paying a lot of attention to investment promotion and facilitation, creating special organizations for this purpose, informative materials, and soft-landing services, while promoting investment targets and acting as a bridge between investors and companies in need of investment. Although Finland is a developed country, its position in Europe is still comparatively peripheral and its economy has been hit in the 2010s by the demise of Nokia, on which it was largely dependent (The Economist, 2012). Chinese investment in Finland has been increasing, but accounts for only a minor proportion of its investment in Nordic countries. Most Chinese investment goes into Finnish information technology, healthcare, and biotechnology sectors (Kalendiene *et al.*, 2017). Golden Bridge, one of Finland's initiatives to attract Chinese investment, resulted from a memorandum of understanding between China's Ministry of Commerce and Finland's Ministry of Employment and Economy, which was signed in 2010. Golden Bridge has operated since 2011 and attracted EUR 120 million of investment up to 2015. The largest such projects included Huawei setting up a research and development centre in Helsinki and one of the leading high-tech parks Zhong Guan Cun, establishing a new liaison office in the region. In 2015, the China-Finland Innovation Center Oy (Golden Bridge) was transferred from the Helsinki Business Hub to Finpro; and its goal is to reach average EU levels of FDI (Helsinki Business Hub, 2015).

The work of investment agencies with Chinese investors is a comparatively new and little-researched aspect of co-operation with China. In this study, the terms 'investment attraction', 'promotion' and 'facilitation' will be used inter-

changeably, all understood as aiming to increase FDI and enhance its contribution to national economic development. Such activities involve planning for the most effective use of resources for investment promotion and developing policies to improve the investment climate (OECD, 2015).

Attracting Chinese investment and promoting Finnish products in the Chinese market both involve the Finns taking on a selling role. In practice, product sales and investment attraction are often connected, as investments are often required to develop products for export. An important part of investment facilitation, and co-operation more generally, consists of meetings with visiting delegations representing the other party. Such visits involve enterprise interest matchmaking events, meetings with officials, company visits, etc. While these activities connecting China and Finland have been going on for some years, matching interests, finding common ground, and maintaining partnerships are still considered challenging. Wang (2007), who has studied Sino-Finnish partnerships, suggests that finding the right approach for the partnership strategy is not easy, and that partnerships often dissolve before their avowed goals are achieved. The motivations for co-operation arise from needs, interests, and development strategies originating from a specific national context, which can be difficult to match with those of the other. Chinese coming to Finland are typically also interested in technology transfer and in training or exchange programmes.

As part of the background of this study and topic, I will now turn to my own experience in similar context, since as a researcher I am also an instrument of research. This doctoral dissertation has grown out of a Master's thesis that I conducted on Chinese investment initiatives in the Baltic Sea region, within the Baltic Sea Region studies programme at the University of Turku (Stopniece, 2010). The study examined multiple aspects of this new regional phenomenon, such as the background of co-operation initiatives, their strategies, the attitudes of local inhabitants, and the adjustment of Chinese representatives to local conditions. I considered the cases of China trade centres in Kouvola (Finland) and Kalmar (Sweden), as well as urban renewal investment in St. Petersburg, drawing information from newspaper and Internet publications and then performing interviews informed by these preliminary sources. I analyzed the case of Kouvola in greater detail, including a fieldtrip, direct observation, and additional interviews with representatives of local government and a business support organization as well as with Chinese entrepreneurs at the trade centre. The study found that those interviewed believed that intercultural communication played a crucial role in the success of these initiatives and needed further examination. For instance, Chinese entrepreneurs expected more support, involvement, and communication from the local government. They implied that they felt abandoned by the local government; after arranging necessary formalities they apparently were expected to take care of themselves. Meanwhile, the Kouvola business support organization used written materials to introduce Chinese entrepreneurs to laws and regulations related to business in Finland, but later recognized that this was not the most effective approach, as face-to-face communi-

cation and explanation was preferred by the Chinese. Participants of the study suggested that more mediators – Chinese with sufficient experience in Finland – were needed. After completing this study, I remained curious about communication in similar contexts, wanting to explore related issues in more detail. The present dissertation continues my previous research, with a narrower focus on investment facilitation. At present, this topic appears to be more relevant and accessible than that of ongoing investment projects as such. Projects reaching the realization stage are difficult to acquire access to, and few of them have been publicly announced.

In addition to previous research experience in the topic area, I consider that my personal background is also favourable for addressing the subject of Finnish–Chinese negotiation. I am originally from Latvia, and have lived, studied and worked in Finland for seven years and acquired Finnish citizenship four years ago. I visited China for the first time about twelve years ago, have been married to a Chinese citizen for eleven years, and have lived in China for the last four years. Thus, I have closely experienced both Finnish and Chinese cultural contexts, but I believe I have maintained an outsider’s perspective: not fully identifying with or being immersed in either perspective. I have been interested in intercultural communication, studying it, and living it on a daily basis for many years. I hope that my personal experience can bring a qualitatively different flavour and a degree of cultural insight that has not been there in similar studies of intercultural communication.

1.2 Key concepts of the study

In this section, I will clarify the meanings of main concepts used in this study – power, common ground, and culture – and explain how I applied these concepts in my research.

Concerning the concept of *power* in intercultural communication, I use the approach of Jensen referred to as ‘power as described’ (2006). This approach treats power as a description of how people define their own actions in relation to power. Intercultural communication in practice concerns not just two persons of differing cultural background who speak to each other, but also involves power and related actions. Jensen (2006) sees power as inscribed in the perspective or language, power as motivation, and power displayed in the construction of the Other. Power is thus defined as something produced in communication and upheld by structures of interaction as well as institutions and social structures. Structures of interaction place interlocutors in different positions of power, which affect their communication strategies accordingly (Isotalus, 2006). Schwartz and Bardi (2001) present power as a value construct that involves social status and prestige as well as control or dominance over people and resources. Related concepts include social power, authority, wealth, and public image. Along with achievement, power belongs to self-enhancement needs in a structured relationship (Schwartz, 1992).

When considering power, it is worthwhile to distinguish various types or intensities of power, such as for instance the 'soft power' and 'hedging' discussed in the discipline of international relations. The power of a nation is said to consist of both 'hard' and 'soft' power (Nye, 2004). Hard power most often refers to military capacity and is not relevant in the types of negotiations considered in this study. Strategic hedging, however, aims to find a balance between 'hard' and 'soft' power in relation to a long term plan to develop national economic capacity (Tessman, 2012). The concept of hedging is borrowed from the new theory of strategic hedging in International Relations (Salman & Geeraerts, 2015). Strategic hedging behaviour will often have positive effects on political and economic relationships between the hedging state and other countries; however, at times it may produce an adverse effect (Geeraerts & Salman, 2016). In practice, hedging involves active policies in pursuit of national interests (be they economic, regional, security, domestic policy, or other interests) that do not openly antagonize 'the hegemon' (Salman, Pieper & Geeraerts, 2015). While the concept of hedging is perhaps best tailored to the examination of China-U.S. relations, which are much more competitive than China-Finland relations, hedging can be more generally understood as an effort to actively engage another player with one's own benefit in mind, applying pressure to facilitate the pursuit of one's aims. Meanwhile, the concept of 'soft' power involves the uses of economic, diplomatic, and institutional tools (Pape, 2005) to achieve national aims, such as the funding of Confucius institutes around the world to promote Chinese culture and learning the Chinese language.

The notion of *common ground* is another of the most important concepts of this study. In a pragmatic sense, common ground can be understood the mutual interest that enables parties to move forward with common goals in a matter involving co-operation, trade, or investment. Garber (2006) sees the search for common ground as an aspect of collaborative management, within which organizations everywhere are challenged to work more closely with one another. Gray (1989) states that collaboration is necessary for finding common ground and lists the following key steps: exploring how to get parties together to define the problem, establishing a common agenda, and implementing the agreed-upon solution. Common ground is one of the main affiliation strategies in Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), which is labeled as a positive politeness strategy. In an experiment by Horton and Keysar (1996), speakers described objects to listeners in a modified version of the referential communication task. While descriptions offered without time constraints appeared to incorporate common ground with the listener, speakers under time pressure did not consider common ground. This suggests that finding common ground takes time. The concept of common ground is also interpreted as achieving enough joint understanding of a matter to make it possible to proceed with communication and collaboration. Stalnaker (1999) considers common ground to involve intuitions about things that are not said but merely presupposed, and asserts that it plays an important role in the communication process. One side may expect an understanding to be common ground while the opposite side may not

agree. Not everyone may know or believe the same things, and this is notably the case when people carry very different cultural backgrounds into an interaction (Korta & Perry, 2011). Common ground implies a win-win outcome for both sides, as in given negotiation, each side is free to get involved in the process or to withdraw.

Culture is also an important concept in this study. I chose an ethnographic approach for this study because the traditional cultural division among societies according to national or *large culture* characteristics (such as that developed by Hofstede, 1980) cannot be applied universally. According to Holliday (1999), 'culture' has come to refer to ethnic, national, and international entities by default. This *large culture* paradigm is vulnerable to cultural reductionism concerning, for example, 'foreign' students or teachers and their educational contexts. 'Large culture' therefore seems to offer only limited explanatory power when confronted with the complex social situations of everyday life. *Small culture*, however, refers to small social groupings or contexts where cohesive behaviour is found. This way, ethnic, national, or international cultural stereotyping can be avoided. This study will use a 'small culture' approach to interpret the actions of Finnish and Chinese representatives. Their small cultures orient the research design and offer an interpretive device to understand emergent behaviour rather than appealing to pre-determined ethnic, national, or international differences (Holliday, 1999). Such a mindset is not dominated by ethnocentrism and is open to different perspectives, much like the 'third culture' approach proposed by Bennett (1976). Meanwhile, according to Philipsen, 'culture' can be understood 'not like a place, country, or a group, but a code – a historically situated and socially constructed system of terms and meanings, premises, and rules' (2010, p. 2). Thus, one is not a 'member of a culture', but someone who 'uses,' 'deploys', and 'experiences' a particular cultural code. Such tools as Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, 2010) thereby inspire an investigative strategy that is open to more nuanced cultural manifestations that need not correspond to generalized national characteristics

1.3 Aims and research questions

The overarching aim of this study is to investigate emerging power relations between Finns as marketers of investment opportunities and products and Chinese as investors, buyers, and partners.

The component research questions of the study, moving from the most general to more specific ones, are the following:

- 1) What insights about intercultural communication and the meanings and interpretations of its participants can be drawn from this context? Seeking to contribute to our understanding of culturally loaded working life, this research initiative aims to contribute new empirical data on communication in multicultural workplaces.

- 2) What new theoretical insights can be gained into the connection between power positioning and finding common ground in negotiations? A theory of the case will be developed based on these initiatives in Finland to facilitate Chinese investment, trade, and co-operation.
- 3) What role does the 'rise of China' play in the intercultural negotiation and search for common ground between Finnish and Chinese representatives? As power relations switch in favour of Chinese representatives across the globe, the insights of the study can be applicable on a wider scale in similar settings.
- 4) What does the everyday reality of Finnish and Chinese representatives doing the job of investment, co-operation, and trade facilitation look like? The perspective of Finnish representatives provided in this study may show some similarities with those of other small developed countries seeking Chinese co-operation and investment. It may also be relevant to interested Chinese counterparts who want to achieve a better understanding of this context.

These research questions will address several relevant issues arising within this study.

1.4 The structure of the compilation

The compilation part of this dissertation contains the main points of the study, and offers a review of what has been accomplished. It has also provided an opportunity to include material that was left out of individual articles due to scope or space limitations. After these introductory sections, the main elements of the compilation are the theoretical framework and method section, the summary and key findings of the research articles, an overall summary of the results of the study, and a concluding discussion.

In the theoretical framework section, I will first introduce ethnography as a perspective of doing this study. Then I will turn to the main theories used in this study – the Positioning Theory articulated by Harré (1991), the Speech Codes Theory set out by Philipsen (1997), and the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) – drawing links between them and explaining how each of these offer valuable, complementary perspectives on the data of this study.

The main elements of the research design section will address observation and interviews, analysis of qualitative data, and ethical aspects of the study. While describing how the study was carried out, I will also take the opportunity to evaluate the research process, narrating in details what and how I learned in the course of the project.

As I provide summaries and key findings of the component research articles of the dissertation, I will present a short description of some contextual elements. Specifically, I consider several elements of the SPEAKING model by

Hymes (1974), such as setting and scene, participants, and ends as providing relevant background for the upcoming key findings of the articles. This discussion is followed by summaries of five empirical research reports exploring the major themes emerging in the data: adjustment of Finns to Chinese cultural norms, the search for common ground with Chinese representatives, guest-host positioning during visits of delegations, humour in negotiations, and the language choices related to co-operation. Each topic reveals particular aspects of the intertwining of power positioning and search for common ground. After presenting an extended summary of each article, I discuss what each contributed to the overall development of the research project. I also introduce connections between the articles of the dissertation in the discussion of findings in each article, developing the 'red thread' that runs through the papers. The overall theme of the dissertation - intertwining of power dynamics and the search for common ground in China-Finland investment, trade, and co-operation negotiations - will be elaborated, introducing a new theoretical contribution. The individual papers will be tied together in an additional analysis of main findings of the research project as a whole.

Finally, in the discussion, I will revisit the aims of the study, present key findings, and consider the theoretical and practical implications of the research as a whole. The discussion will also consider the shortcomings and limitations of the study, as well as offering recommendations for further research and final remarks.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

2.1 Dominant perspectives in research on business communication with China

In this section, I will provide an overview on literature that is relevant for the topic of this study, foregrounding the choice of theoretical approach.

Although marketing to the Chinese in Finland is a comparatively new phenomenon, similar dynamics have been considered in previous research carried out in other national contexts. In an experimental design by Pornpitakpan (2003a) regarding Americans selling to Chinese (in the PRC), the relationship between measures of adaptation and attraction was found to be consistently positive, reaching a plateau phase at a moderate degree of adaptation. In a follow-up study on the effect of cultural adaptation by American business people on their perceived trustworthiness according to Chinese business people, Pornpitakpan (2003b) discovered that high levels of adaptation, especially in native language conditions, results in higher disconfirmation of stereotypes than did the no adaptation condition. These results contrasted with previous studies by Francis (1991) who tested the effects of adaptive behaviours during intercultural buyer and seller negotiations. These earlier results suggested that moderate adaptation may be an optimal strategy, as it improved attractiveness without risking the loss of trustworthiness. Substantial adaptation resulted in a violation of stereotypic expectations and therefore resulted in lower trustworthiness when compared to stereotypic or moderate adaptation.

The study by Luk *et al.* (1999) exploring the market characteristics and their implications for effective sales strategies in China concluded that foreign companies adopting direct sales methods were more successful. Relationship marketing was accepted by Chinese consumers as a preferred sales channel against the background of economic development and infrastructure problems in China. In a study by Merilees and Miller (1999) on newer forms of direct sales, a comparison between China and Australia revealed that in both countries, product elements and relationship elements each have an impact on the effectiveness of

marketing initiatives. In relative terms, relationship elements are more important in China, and cultural differences seem to be the main reason for these results. This finding is consistent with other comparative studies, as in China, the elements of relationship marketing are more coherent and form a holistic configuration known as *guanxi*. According to Harrison and Hedley (2010), Western companies that understand local needs and build personal relationships have more success in marketing and selling to Chinese businesses. To sum up, the importance of adaptation and relationships while selling to the Chinese appear to be common denominators of these studies.

According to the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) elaborated by Bennett (1986; 1993; 2004; 2013), the experience of cultural difference typically starts from an ethnocentric perspective and proceeds through stages of denial, defense, then minimization, and then shifts towards ethnorelativism through phases of acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The DMIS continuum extends from the experience of one's own culture as central to reality, to the seeing one's own and other cultures as relative to context. This process is presented as one-way, permanent, and applicable to anything defined as cultural difference, although it allows for 'retreats' from specific positions. Terms related to DMIS have been used in some studies concerning expatriate adjustment to China (Selmer, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2014).

Turning more specifically to areas where adaptation would be needed, traditional research into business communication has emphasized the differences between China and the so-called West, at times producing sweeping generalizations and dichotomies. I will consider only the aspects of certain studies that appear particularly relevant to Finnish-Chinese negotiations, without fleshing out (or adopting) their larger frameworks. For instance, Hofstede's (1980) prominent study suggests that one of the main contrasts in communication may involve the dimension of power distance, as Chinese society has been seen to have a steeper hierarchy and display a greater deference towards those in power than typical in Western societies. Another widely used perspective is based on the writings of Hall (1983) who has explored the concept of time in various cultures, making a distinction between a monochronic time orientation, typical of most Western societies, and the polychronic time orientation characterizing China, among other countries. In a monochronic time system, time is seen as linear, scheduled, and segmented, while in the polychronic orientation, several things can be done at the same time and plans may change often and easily. Exploring the influence of Confucian values on Chinese working life, Ock Yum (1997, p. 85) identifies one of the characteristic traits of Chinese working life as indirect communication, which 'helps to prevent the embarrassment of disagreement among partners, leaving the relationship and each other's 'face' intact.' Another aspect seen as crucial is the long time required to build relationships before engaging in business, which can be related to the distinction between in-group and out-group in Confucian societies. It has been proposed that an intermediary is needed to bridge between in-group and out-group members and to initiate a new relationship (Ock Yum, 1997). Gao and Ting-

Toomey (1998), in turn, have listed five distinctive characteristics of indigenous Confucian cultural traditions in the Chinese style of communication: (1) implicit communication (*hanxu*), (2) listening-centred communication (*tinghua*), (3) polite communication (*keqi*), (4) insider-communication (*zijiren*), and (5) face-directed communication (*mianzi*).

While there is plenty of merit in this earlier line of research, it can at times be seen to reproduce an exoticized image of the Chinese as 'the other', emphasizing cultural differences and over-generalizing instead of seeing these phenomena as depending on particular conditions. Characterizing Chinese business negotiation styles, Fang (1999) provides an in-depth socio-cultural consideration of Chinese negotiating behaviour and tactics, distinguishing various components of Chinese business culture. The major components of his 'Ping Pong model' and related identities of negotiator are PRC conditioning ('bureaucrat'), religion ('gentleman'), and 36 stratagems of Sun Tze, a revered Chinese military general during the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history ('strategist'). Fang argues that the approach taken in negotiations depends greatly on the degree of trust granted; Chinese negotiators will approach high-trust negotiations as gentlemen, but in low trust situations, they will tend to negotiate as strategists. Also, when political or policy aspects of a situation are prominent, Chinese representatives will typically negotiate from a bureaucratic standpoint.

Recent scholarship has started to produce an even more nuanced image regarding negotiation between Chinese and non-Chinese. Fang and Faure (2011) argue that Chinese communication behaviour which is contrary to the traditional qualities described above is also evident in Chinese society in certain situations and contexts. The interaction between traditional Chinese values, modernization, and influences from the rest of the world may create unexpected cultural expressions. For instance, one result of China's market-oriented economic development has been the rise of the stance referred to as *bu tinghua* (not listening, not obeying). A study by Kommonen (2008) revealed that Chinese colour culture in business contexts consists of a mixture of traditional and modern attitudes. At times, colours are used to express traditional meanings, but occasionally other, modern meanings of colours can be observed. Some have argued that the divide between the West and the Rest is no longer relevant, because traces of Western influence are now found everywhere, as well as vice versa (Morley, 2011). While Confucianism remains a significant contributor to Chinese cultural values, globalization and the emergence of capitalism have propelled the Chinese people to become extremely changeable in their attitudes (Chuang, 2004).

To sum up, recent scholarship distinguishes new elements and shifting features of culture in China, which derive in part from social change and interaction with so-called Western values.

Describing the cultures and codes used in human interactions is essential to understand individual lives and societal patterns, but it is also important to remember that these are dynamic resources used by social actors to achieve their objectives (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005). Within a single society and a single language,

differences may occur between social or cultural groups, and personal styles will also exist within any of these categories (Hymes, 1974). Therefore, it is necessary

to turn to the contexts of conversations, and less to personalities of people, more to interactional forms and styles, and less to psychological traits and dispositions; more to social and cultural situations, and less to abstract and universal dimensions.¹

Another trend in recent research is to examine traditional Chinese culture from a perspective that emphasizes differences among regions (Shuping, 2001). By its nature, the concept of culture implies openness and diverse approaches, and therefore calls for a narrower focus to ensure the applicability of a particular model (Wang, 2011). This point is especially true of China, a large and culturally 'dense' country consisting of many different regions, containing numerous minorities having distinct cultural traits.

Cultural learning occurs not only from one's parents and within one's cultural group, but also from exposure to different national, cultural, and individual characteristics. Borderless and connected workplaces, marketplaces, and cyberspace are increasingly important features of our social environment (Fang, 2012b). Also, multicultural persons may be able to speak or to behave in many different ways in different contexts. Likewise, it is possible for a person to dislike or disown some particular practice associated with 'his people or place' (Carbaugh, 2005, p. 132). Jameson (2007) considers that just as growing up in a country contributes to an individual's values, beliefs, and behaviour, so too does acculturation into a particular field or profession. Intercultural conflicts may also occur between or within businesses in a single national context, while international affiliates may share aspects of common culture (Louhiala-Salminen, 1997). In a globalizing world, the meaning of culture is complex, and the dynamic processes of cultural change are ongoing (Leung *et al.*, 2009).

Understanding the nuances of intercultural communication requires an understanding of the context in which it takes place. For example, a study by Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003) illustrates how the same series of meetings can be perceived very differently by Chinese and British participants. In their study, the Chinese were dissatisfied due to inappropriate seating arrangements and the perceived lack of gratitude of their counterparts for Chinese contracts, factors of which the British side was not aware. Rather than analyzing an isolated piece of discourse and then jumping into sweeping cultural generalization, the authors emphasize the importance of the broader context within which an intercultural encounter takes place. For instance, such factors as previously heard rumours about the company strongly influenced the Chinese side's expectations of the case analyzed.

In summary, studies to date have mainly outlined differences between Chinese and so-called Western communications styles, describing how Chinese traditional values might affect business interactions. However, some studies also examine the way the forces of modernization may change traditional culture,

¹ Carbaugh 2005, 13

differences across various professional groups, as well as other factors influencing communication. In the current situation, such an update is necessary to verify whether and in what ways traditional Chinese cultural values currently affect business communications. There is also a lack of research on intercultural communication in the specific context of Chinese investment facilitation, where the Chinese representatives tend to exert more power than before.

2.2 Ethnography of communication as a perspective

As this study proceeded from a general interest in Chinese-Finnish intercultural negotiation to the specific context of investment, trade, and co-operation facilitation, an inductive approach appeared to be the most appropriate. This choice was also intended to facilitate the discovery of new dynamics and nuances in communication rather than proceeding from or confirming dichotomies or simplistic assumptions. The decision was made to investigate these phenomena from an ethnographic perspective, giving emphasis to the meanings ascribed by participants. Thus, the main focus of this study has been observing and analyzing intercultural communication from their perspective. Ethnographic research consists of 'noticing, discovering, and recording communication practices that are significant to those being studied,' attempting to understand the meanings of particular practices from the perspective of the participants themselves (Carbaugh, 2005, p. 132). 'Ethnography of communication' is a term used to indicate the scope of studies that are ethnographic in nature and deal with communication (Hymes, 1974). Ethnographic approaches help to meet the need for extensive, naturalistic description of settings and contexts and to understand the meaning attributed by participants. This allows for a coherent story of their social life and circumstances to be narrated (Jessor, 1996).

Ethnography originated in the works of 19th-century anthropologists investigating pre-industrial societies. Nowadays the term is used much more broadly, and may include studies of industrial and post-industrial cultures. A 'first-hand' experience is still valued in this tradition, as many researchers believe it is necessary to participate in the setting to gain a proper understanding of it (Silverman, 2005). This view has given rise to the method of participant observation. Based on their observations, researchers write ethnographies. The term 'ethnography' consists of 'ethno' (folk) and 'graph' (writing). Thus, ethnography is 'social scientific writing about particular "folks"' (Silverman, 2005, p. 67). Ethnography facilitates research into how people think and what cultural meanings they use in daily life (Spradley, 1980a). True ethnography views culture as analytically separate from behaviour. Culture is seen as an explanatory resource to help describe variations in behaviour and social development (Jessor, 1996).

While the study resulting from this research project is not itself an ethnography as it did not involve an extended period of participant observation, it nevertheless reflects an ethnographic perspective. Drawing mostly on inter-

views and some participant observation, it explores the meanings attributed by participants in Chinese investment facilitation in Finland. An ethnographic perspective was incorporated in observation followed up by interviews, as some of those interviewed were participants in the interactions observed. Also, considerable attention was given to specific details and participants' explanations for them in the context studied, which is reflected in the resulting articles through the use of fieldnote excerpts and interview quotations. Participant observation data was given a comparatively limited weight in analysis and reporting, as the interviews turned out to be a richer source of meanings relevant to the topic, but the main points made in each article were backed up both by interviews and observations. Also, ethnographic studies can be entirely based on interviews (Spradley, 1980b), so they need not necessarily be synonymous with an emphasis on fieldwork, but may more broadly encompass research that seeks to present the world view expressed by its participants. Following Watson (2011), I understand ethnography not as a research method, but rather as a way of writing about and analyzing social life, which may incorporate any of the full range of research methods available. To investigate the realities of 'how things work,' ethnographic approaches contextualize the activities the researcher observes and the accounts received from informants. Researchers attempt to 'get into the heads' of participants to capture their subjective experiences. Forsey (2010) describes an ethnographic interview as 'participant listening' and underscores the fact that we live in an 'interview society'. He argues for the importance of engaged listening and maintains that an interview conducted with an ethnographic imaginary is an 'experience-near' event in Western settings, offering truly ethnographic moments.

Ethnographic description can also be considered to represent the micro scale, dealing with small matters identified within the contexts studied (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography is usually done in pursuit of a single aim: discovering the cultural knowledge people in a particular setting use to organize their behaviour and interpret their experience. The principles of ethnography were used to identify inductively the most important themes in the context of this study. Ethnographic study can be carried out not only to understand human beings, but also to serve their needs (Spradley, 1980a). Studying interaction between Finnish and Chinese representatives in the context of investment, trade, and cooperation facilitation initiatives directed at China appears to have considerable practical relevance at present, and the insights arising from such research can be useful for those working in this and related fields. In particular, the study reveals nuanced cultural meanings encountered in this context, contributes to the understanding of newly emerging power dynamics, and demonstrates the ways common ground is being formed between Finnish and Chinese representatives.

2.3 Theories used in research articles

In this section, I will consider the main theoretical frameworks that I have engaged with in my research articles; these were introduced into the research process as appropriate, according to an inductive approach. Theories relevant to the main themes that emerged in the process of data analysis were used as resources to explain the context described. As intercultural communication is an interdisciplinary field, these theories were drawn from different disciplines as relevant to the topics studied. Most significant were the Positioning Theory of Harré (1991), which originated in social psychology, Philipsen's Speech Codes Theory (1997), which came from communication studies, and the Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), which arose in the pragmatics sub-field of linguistics.

Another theoretical framework that could have been chosen relates to specific understandings of negotiation, for instance, Ghauri and Usunier's (2003) framework that distinguishes the background factors (objectives, environment), process (stages, cultural and strategic dimensions), and atmosphere of the business negotiation (conflict/co-operation/expectations). This study did not proceed from a negotiation perspective because negotiation was not strictly a major focus of the study initially; rather it began by using an inductive approach considering communication in general. Also, the study did not examine negotiation as traditionally defined, because advanced stages of the negotiation process were not available for observation. Rather, the activities observed included investment facilitation and social introductions of Finnish and Chinese representatives to one another with no clear outcomes, so a focus on negotiation was seen as too restrictive. Without encompassing all phases considered within theories of negotiation, however, the term 'negotiation' nevertheless captured the nature of the activities observed more accurately than other terms. In addition, although this study on intercultural communication concerns the field of business, it proceeded more from the perspective of humanistic study rather than the social sciences, which had an impact on the choice of theories. The overall results of this study run partly in parallel to the theories dealing with negotiation and intercultural competence - as will be examined in the discussion section - but these outcomes have been arrived at following an inductive rather than a deductive approach.

This study predominantly builds on Harré's (1991) Positioning Theory, which is referred to explicitly in four research articles included in this dissertation. The theory addresses power, positioning, and accommodation in intercultural communication, and invokes the actors' need to attend to local moral orders; it centres on the view that the local distribution of rights and duties motivates various actions and thus drives the way interactions unfold. As changing power dynamics turned out to be an important part of this study, this theory offered explanations for multiple choices individuals made to position themselves in response to an unfolding narrative and to change and adjust their po-

sition (Davies & Harré, 1990). In all human interaction there are asymmetries in the resources available for social action in the concrete circumstances experienced by each individual. A cluster of short-term asserted rights, obligations, and duties is called a *position*, and this in turn determines the access participants may claim to cultural resources (Harré, 2012). For instance, using Positioning Theory to analyze the papers left by Kissinger, the American diplomat, drew attention to the many important interactions between nation states that take place in the form of small-scale interactions involving very few representatives. Sustaining intergroup harmony requires pre-established interpretations for the actions of individuals; while they may be cast into certain positions by the dominant speaker, individuals can also challenge or revise these positions (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003b). The group context is evaluated in terms of secure or threatening relationship perceptions, giving rise to normatively prescribed cooperative or competitive behaviour. These positions can be internally inconsistent and externally contested (Louis, 2008). Positioning theory is suitable for addressing the dynamic of attracting Chinese investment, where both traditional and modern cultural values are present and power relations among representatives are being actively negotiated. Such a perspective accounts for the possibility of different choices of actions depending on the situational context.

Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, 1997) and its updated version (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005) were developed specifically for the ethnography of communication. This theory was used mostly in the earlier stages of this study and is referred to in the second article addressing the search for common ground. I used Speech Codes Theory to interpret certain cultural aspects observed in the context of communication, as this is an original cultural theory of human communication. *Speech codes* are understood as 'systems of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct' (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). In its most recent formulation, the theory has six propositions, which can be shortly stated as follows: (1) each culture has its own distinctive speech codes; (2) any speech community uses multiple speech codes; (3) each speech code involves distinct psychology, sociology, and rhetoric; (4) cultural beliefs dictate a participant's interpretation of communication; (5) terms, rules, and premises of the speech code are revealed in speaking, and (6) speech codes frame responses according to socially-accepted norms (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005). The theory is a synthesis of the knowledge distilled from a wide range of fieldwork examining culturally distinct ways of speaking. Three propositions of the Speech Codes Theory were seen as most relevant for this study, especially the second proposition: 'any speech community uses multiple speech codes' (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005, p. 59). Different codes related to communicative conduct, or at least traces of them, can be found coexisting in the same life-world. My interpretation of the data was also influenced by the fourth proposition of the theory, which states that 'interacting sides tend to interpret communicative conduct according to practices in their own culture' (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005, p. 62). Proposition six of the theory observed that speech codes frame responses according to accepted social patterns; this was used to interpret some cultural

expectations brought into negotiation situations. The distinction between the fourth and sixth propositions of this perspective is that according to the former, a cultural reference framework is applied to one's interlocutor, while in the latter case it is applied to oneself. This theory therefore allowed the Finnish viewpoint on communication with Chinese partners to be analyzed against the background of their own practices and expectations.

The insight shared between Speech Codes Theory and Positioning Theory is that both allow choices among multiple options by actors in communication. Thus, a subject is not simply a 'member of a culture', but rather someone who 'uses', 'deploys', and 'experiences' a particular cultural code (Philipsen, 2010). Positioning Theory was therefore used to explore power dynamics between Chinese and Finnish representatives, while Speech Codes Theory was used to explain cultural aspects of communication. However, the latter was not used in more recently written articles, as Positioning Theory was seen to account for a wider variety of factors influencing communication.

Finally, in the last two articles on humour and aspects related to language I also have used the Politeness Theory elaborated by Brown and Levinson (1987). I decided to employ this perspective because, during data analysis, I began to see parallels between this theory's concepts of autonomy and affiliation and my own chosen concepts of power and common ground. Common ground can be explicitly related to Politeness Theory, as it represents one of Brown and Levinson's (1987) main affiliation strategies. In their terms, it is a positive politeness strategy, indicating that at least in some regards the speaker wants the same thing as the hearer. It also signifies that the speaker is treating the hearer as a member of the in-group, emphasizing the common ground. Power, in turn, sometimes connects to the concepts of autonomy and negative politeness strategies. Negative politeness maintains the hearer's claim to territory and self-determination. It is avoidance-based, providing assurance that the hearer's freedom of action will not be impeded, and involves formality and restraint (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 317).

This theory also appeared relevant because of the concept of 'face' used by participants in the study to interpret their interactions, which is also one of the central concepts of Politeness Theory. The concept of 'face', was introduced by Goffman (1967, p. 5), to refer to the 'image of self', but Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) interpret it in terms of 'public self-image'. 'Facework' involves accommodating two different 'face' needs: the need for autonomy and the need for affiliation, one of which may be stronger in a particular culture. For instance, boasting is a particular form of self-presentation, which relates to 'facework' (Scollon & Scollon, 1983). Thus, two different 'face' needs impact the search for common ground; the 'face' of affiliation being in favour of it, while the 'face' of autonomy possibly working against it. Another parallel with Politeness Theory relates to straightforwardness vs. indirectness, as described by Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 317), which can be interpreted as going *on record* vs. going *off record*. Each of these choices carries advantages as well as risks. One may choose to go on record (state directly) to pay respects to 'face', or off record (implying)

to avoid imposing. Bald on-record benefits include claims about efficiency and credit for honesty; however, these may be face-threatening depending on assumptions about the relative power and social distance between speakers and hearers, and how impositions are understood in a particular culture. By going off-record, a speaker can obtain credit for being tactful, non-coercive, cooperative, and generous; this approach is most often used to address situations when the hearer is powerful or a possible imposition is significant (Brown & Lewinson, 1987).

According to Spencer-Oatey and Ruhi (2007), the distinction between positive and negative 'face' is inadequate to cover the complexities of 'face' claims in real-life situations. To address this concern, they introduce the concept of rapport, understood as (dis)harmony and the degree of smoothness or turbulence in relationships (Spencer-Oatey, 2005). The rapport management model starts with the management of relationships, and its motivational force concerns two components: management of face and management of sociality rights. Such rights are connected to personal or social entitlements, as well as concerns regarding fairness, consideration, and social inclusion (Spencer-Oatey & Ruhi, 2007). Sociality rights have two different aspects: first, concern that one is not unfairly imposed on or unduly ordered about, taken advantage of, or exploited and, second, concern that one receive the benefits to which one is entitled. This, in turn, can be connected to two components - cost-benefit, which is kept in approximate balance by reciprocity principle, and autonomy - imposition, relating to the extent to which people control or impose on someone (Spencer-Oatey, 2002). Leech (1983) has explored cost-benefit issues, distinguishing the Tact Maxim and the Generosity Maxim, which are used to navigate cost-benefit dimension. The Tact Maxim involves trying to minimize the cost to others and maximize their benefit. Meanwhile, the Generosity Maxim involves minimizing the benefit to self while maximizing the cost to self. The cost-benefit framework has broader relevance than autonomy alone, because cost potentially relates not only to autonomy but also involves time, effort, inconvenience, risk, etc. Cost-benefit considerations are therefore very relevant in negotiation contexts.

'Facework' refers not only to individuals; often the concept applies to the activity of the group as a whole. Since the context studied includes the interactions and negotiations among groups of Finnish and Chinese representatives, group 'facework' is more relevant for this study. Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2000) also found that during a delegation visit, both British and Chinese business people appeared to orient to each other primarily in terms of group needs and concerns.

The connection between Politeness Theory and Positioning Theory is that both theories involve the option of multiple choices by the actors in communication. One potential difference that can be distinguished is that Positioning Theory predominantly considers the context and the narrative according to which one chooses either common ground or power (external circumstances), but Politeness Theory reveals more about subjective motivations (considerations of 'face') for doing so.

2.4 Observation

To assess the dynamics of Chinese investment, trade, and co-operation facilitation, one of my research techniques was observation. Ethnographic observation lies at the heart of inductive research in communication and provides 'an *emic* account, relevant to the behavior in question' (Hymes, 1974, p. 11). The distinction between *emic* and *etic* approaches originated in the works of the psycholinguist Pike (1967), who explored language as part of a unified theory of human behaviour. Pike referred to culturally general elements as *etic*, and culturally specific ones as *emic*, respectively. Even a few minutes of observation can 'provide a wealth of data and ascertain *emic* relevance' (Hymes, 1974, p. 27).

Observation is very important in a setting of inductive research. Participant observation relates to activities that appear to take place independently of the researcher; such data is also referred to as 'naturally occurring'. Researcher intervention in the situation is therefore reduced, although we cannot consider any data to be 'untouched by human hands' (Silverman, 2006, p. 159). In the process of observation, I attempted to ascertain the patterns of communicative conduct in the local setting. The analysis of real cases and provision of real-life data lies at the heart of studies of intercultural communication and require the primary attention of the researcher (Blommaert, 1998). Ethnography needs to be concerned with 'what people actually do, not just what they "think" and "feel"' (Silverman, 2006, p. 69), and observation provides this opportunity. Interviews alone may not always provide reliable information or provide sufficient context for informed interpretation. Starting the research process with direct observation helped me to conduct more informed and effective interviews later on. The interpretations that may be reached by inquiring into a local code on its own terms are 'more complex, more nuanced, and more reliable than those based on commonsensical notions' (Philipsen, 2010, p. 11).

Gaining access to the opportunities for direct observation was more challenging than I expected, for a variety of reasons; this drawback has affected a good deal of ethnographic work that takes place in international business settings. I was not able to collect as much data by observation as I had originally hoped. I arranged for an internship that would allow two and a half months of observation at a Finnish state agency aiming to attract Chinese investment. However, when I arrived in Finland and presented the informed consent document to the host agency, the CEO decided that the organization could not let me research and write about the agency and its work. Faced with this situation, I decided to seek other opportunities in Finland for participant observation and interviews.

I contacted a local government official in Turku with whom I had previously discussed a pilot observation project. I learned that a Chinese delegation would be visiting Turku from Tianjin a few days later, and I was then able to be a participant observer in this visit. A second observation opportunity came when a friend in Finland was about to come to Suzhou, China with a delegation

visiting from Oulu. I asked if I could observe this visit as well, and access was granted.

So, finally I was able to observe six days of interaction in total, including the Chinese delegation visiting Turku in Finland from Tianjin (October 2013) and the Finnish delegation visiting Suzhou in China from Oulu (May 2014). The visit from Tianjin to Turku took place in the framework of town twinning and involved meetings at a local university and with the local government. Meanwhile, the delegation from Oulu visited Suzhou to promote a Finnish company in China, which involved meetings with representatives of local education institutions, possible investors, the local government, and a business consultant. The main activities of each visit are listed briefly in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Brief contents of delegation visits observed

Delegation visit and time	Places and activities
Delegation visit of Tianjin (China) Science and Technology Committee to the City of Turku on 14 October 2013.	Machine Technology Centre of Turku, University of Applied Sciences - two meetings with representatives of the university, science centre, and local government; visiting the testing site. Restaurant - joint lunch, some more representatives of the local government join in. Exchange of gifts and souvenirs.
Delegation visit of company from Oulu to Suzhou on 5 May 2014.	Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University - private meeting with a professor at her office; meeting with students at an auditorium; analyzing feedback within the visiting delegation outdoors on campus; another meeting with a professor at a cafeteria.
Delegation visit of company from Oulu to Suzhou on 6 May 2014.	Cafeteria on a street in downtown - networking meeting with some local contacts of the visiting business consultant. Short visit to three private educational institutions in the area. Cafeteria - continuing the networking meeting; joined by a representative of Disney and an expatriate English teacher; lunch. Educational training complex - meeting with the director; presentation of product; feedback discussion. Preschool education establishment - meeting director/potential investor; demonstration of product; feedback. An international kindergarten - tour; meeting teachers.
Delegation visit of company from Oulu to Suzhou on 7 May 2014.	Cafeteria in Suzhou industrial park - breakfast and discussion with local contact persons of visiting business consultant. Suzhou Innovation Park - meeting and consultation with the operations director on technical aspects of product in China. Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University - presentation about Finland for wider student circle in the auditorium.

Delegation visit of company from Oulu to Shanghai and Wuxi on 8 May 2014.	Finpro (Shanghai) – presenting the product and discussing feedback with the business consultant; lunch. Restaurant (Wuxi) – meeting a college English teacher; presenting the product; feedback discussion; dinner; analyzing feedback within the visiting group.
Delegation visit of company from Oulu to Suzhou on 9 May 2014.	Vocational art school - meeting its teachers; presenting the product; receiving feedback. Local administration of Suzhou New District – meeting its representative; discussing co-operation in general terms. Educational administration of Suzhou New District – meeting its representative; informal discussion; lunch.

Varying degrees of participation are possible during research. For instance, passive participation involves being present, but not participating or interacting with other people to a large extent. Moderate participation occurs when the researcher tries to find a balance between insider and outsider roles, while active participation occurs when a participant observer seeks to do what others are doing to learn the cultural rules governing their behaviour (Spradley, 1980a). Participation during the two observation phases of this study was mostly moderate. I took part in meals and interacted somewhat with those present. Spradley (1980a) recommends unobtrusiveness, since a low profile is advantageous when observation is carried out over a brief period. The researcher may otherwise have to deal at length with various responses to his or her presence, which may take a good deal of time. While the observer's presence cannot and perhaps also should not be completely concealed, it is best to select a stance that does not attract too much attention to observation activities. Because my activities were confined to a short period of time, unobtrusiveness was important. However, it did feel natural to blend in and to have casual chats during breaks, etc. Most interaction happened in English, and I was able to follow some of the discussion among Chinese representatives in Mandarin. Finnish was not used much during the meetings I observed. While my fluency in English is excellent, my Finnish and Mandarin skills are at intermediate levels.

As I observed these interactions, I was taking field notes. According to Briggs (1986), notes are 'frozen' at the level of insight the researcher possessed at the time and are therefore limited in their potential to explore new theoretical dimensions. However, the alternative of making recordings did not appear to be a good choice in the given setting – field notes were easier to obtain and less intrusive. While I may have lost some conversational detail by relying on field notes, I was more concerned with general topics rather than detailed analysis of conversations. I took field notes during or in some instances shortly after conducting observation, depending on circumstances. I later developed these notes into more organized accounts of my observations (Emerson *et al.*, 1995), which amounted to 29 pages of single-spaced text. When describing my observations, I used concrete language as much as possible rather than summarizing or generalizing, since specific details give depth and substance to ethnographic study (Spradley, 1980a). As much as possible, I also tried to record the participants' own terms for their activities. Excerpts from these field notes were used as data

in the articles making up this dissertation. I also kept a separate fieldwork journal, which included more personal reflections on informants and my own feelings about the fieldwork. Journaling in this way helped me to process my ongoing research activities and decide on further steps to take.

2.5 Interviews

This study's main methodological approach consisted of ethnographic interviews to establish the meanings that representatives of Finland assign to intercultural encounters with their Chinese partners in co-operation and trade facilitation (Emerson *et al.*, 1995). As a researcher becomes familiar with people during participant observation, it opens up possibilities to conduct ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1980a). Thus, some interviews were conducted immediately after my initial observation of the Chinese delegation's visit to the city of Turku. I approached some Finnish representatives who were participating in the visit, asked about the possibility of an interview, and e-mailed them subsequently to provide more information about my research project and to arrange a meeting time. Informants are also participant observers without necessarily being aware of this role, so they can add valuable insights on activities that were observed together (Spradley, 1980a). In addition to general questions, I asked the interviewees to interpret certain situations that we experienced together during the delegation visit. The 'snowball' method of interview recruiting was used: I asked those I interviewed to recommend others for me to contact, who work with similar matters. In a few instances, these inquiries resulted in additional interviews; it appeared to be easier to get a response to an interview request when I was able to refer to someone they know as recommending them as an informant.

Regarding the interviews at the state investment facilitation agency, I did an assignment for the organization, collecting comparative information about their counterpart organizations in the Baltic States. I worked at this task for a few weeks at home, searching online for investment facilitation organizations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and organizing basic information, including contacts, in a database. In return, I was granted interviews with three employees of this agency.

Thus, I carried out a total of nine interviews in the autumn of 2013 at the China Finland Golden Bridge office in Helsinki as well as local government offices in Turku and Lahti. The ages of those I interviewed ranged from mid-20s into their 60s. Four were representatives of local or regional governments; three were team members of a state investment attraction agency, and two were Chinese interpreters working for Finnish organizations. The length of experience these informants had in co-operation with China ranged from four to 20 years. Two Finns also had experience living and working in China, one for five years and another for six years. The Chinese interviewees had lived in Finland between five and 20 years; all had some education in Finland, and had worked for

Finnish-Chinese co-operation ventures for about two years. One of the interview subjects was a person of Japanese origin who had worked for Chinese co-operation in Finland for five years. Each interview was about one hour long, resulting in approximately nine hours of recorded material. Some basic data for each interview subject – their gender, country of origin, and position in their respective organization – is provided in Table 2, where they are listed in interview sequence. I also used these codes in dissertation articles when referring to the statements of these informants.

TABLE 2 Interview respondent codes and basic data

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

As is typical for qualitative research interviews with a small sample of respondents, I used ‘open-ended’ questions (Silverman, 2006; Briggs, 1986). During the interview, participants were encouraged to offer their own definitions of specific activities and were also asked how they assign meaning to their problems (Silverman, 2006). The interview was divided into several segments. I began by asking about the interviewee’s role in their respective organization and their background, and then moved on to discuss their interaction with Chinese partners. Also, I asked about the communication styles they had observed interacting with Chinese representatives and possible cultural factors that might be involved in various contexts. Finally, I invited the participants to discuss critical incidents they had experienced, including both positive and negative experiences, and to draw some conclusions about their experience of co-operation so far. The interview questions that were used most often are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Main interview segments and questions

Interview segment	Examples of questions asked
Broad start-up questions	What is your role in the organization? How long have you worked here? What background expertise and experience brought you to this role at this place and time?
Patterns of exposure /contact	What kinds of contact do you have with the Chinese in your work? In what kinds of settings and situations? How frequently? What kinds of interaction do your work duties require or encourage you to have? What, if any, contact do you have with the Chinese outside the workplace?

Communication style	Have you noticed differences in communication style between yourself and the Chinese visitors? Do you attribute them to cultural differences, or do other reasons occur to you? What suggests these are (or aren't) cultural differences? Can you also think of some similarities between Finns and the Chinese?
Various settings of communication	Could you reflect on and compare communication in various settings, such as: within your team; between you and investors; between the Chinese investors and their partners in Finland; in matchmaking events; in fairs; when delegation comes to visit; other settings?
Critical incidents in communication	Can you think of specific moments between the Chinese and Finns in which expectations for communication seemed particularly relevant to the moment? These might be positive - finding out something surprising and fascinating; or negative - miscommunication / misunderstandings, barriers, difficulty carrying out a task because of different expectations, etc.
Stage of co-operation and learning	What kind of conclusions can you draw from the co-operation so far? What, to your mind, is running smoothly? What challenges still need to be tackled? Has your awareness on negotiating with the Chinese grown in the process; in what ways?
Close up question	Is there anything else about working with representatives of China that you would like to tell me?

There were a few questions about communication style that could provoke explanations based on dichotomies, as could the questions about critical incidents. Interviews can at times produce opinions that are informed by cultural stereotypes, as both researchers and those working in the field have been reading and learning about these possible differences. However, such questions were balanced by asking also about aspects of broader relevance, which would involve other factors. For instance, there was a question about challenges to be tackled in co-operation, and interview subjects mostly responded by mentioning structural issues such as government regulations.

Between the main segments of questions, I allowed the conversation to take a direction preferred by the informant, providing facilitation with context-relevant questions. Respondents sometimes benefit from wandering off-topic and providing what seems at first to be unnecessary information. This interaction allows for more equal distribution of control over the situation and increases the ecological validity of the interview, its correspondence to everyday circumstances, making it a richer source of data (Briggs, 1986). When interview subjects mentioned interesting topics, such as humour in negotiation, I later brought up the topic in some subsequent interviews, as well.

Five interviews were conducted in the workplaces of those interviewed, two in cafeterias, and the remaining two by Skype. I recorded all interviews, with the informed consent of participants. These files were later uploaded to computer and transcribed, resulting in 66 pages of single-spaced interview transcript material. The interview quotations used in the articles are direct citations except of cases where they had to be corrected to enhance comprehension, while keeping the same content. While none of those interviewed was a native

English speaker, all interviews were conducted in English. My Finnish and Mandarin skills are not sufficient for research purposes, and the participants were all fluent in English as the working language in the contexts studied.

2.6 Data analysis

The first phase of data transcription coincided with my move to China. I decided to work with the existing data for a while, because settling down after the move took time. Further data collection in China or while based in China, or additional field work in Finland were all open possibilities at that point. I decided that to move the dissertation process forward, I could use existing data to write an article or two while I was still in transition. As I started data analysis, I discovered several themes and interpretations arising from this material, which I developed into topics for articles. At that point, I had the opportunity for an additional participant observation project in China, as mentioned above. I began several draft articles, for which publication opportunities arose comparatively quickly. I appeared to have relevant material in which publishers were interested. As my publications continued, my supervisors suggested that I begin to write the compilation part of the dissertation.

In analyzing the observation and interview data, I used a fluid, incremental approach, beginning with a developmental research method and progressing to a close reading of the transcripts, content analysis, and finally, thick description. The material was examined several times with the help of various data analysis methods to discern the broader context and the connections between individual instances observed and interview utterances. In the study of culture, 'analysis begins with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematizing those' (Geertz, 1973, p. 22). Qualitative software was not used in this process, mainly due to the fact that the corpus of data was sufficiently limited that it could be handled by traditional means, so there was no pressing need to use a program.

The ethnographic developmental research method is to 'search for the parts of culture, the relationship among the parts, and their relationship to the whole' (Spradley, 1980a, p. 116). In this type of analysis, cultural domains are used as the first organizing principle. They present categories of meaning, where a category is an array of different objects that are treated as if they were equivalent. The domain can be labelled using the participants' terminology, the researcher's own analytic terms, or by mixing both of these (Spradley, 1980a). The purpose of analysing interview data, in this approach, is to find out how participants are interpreting the events and phenomena observed (Silverman, 2006). I used this approach most notably when producing my first article on the adjustment Finns made towards the Chinese, where the domains were primary cultural categories used by those interviewed – the concept of time, indirectness, and hierarchy. I sorted my research material according to these categories and how these were used in concrete activities (Silverman, 2006). The findings I pre-

sented in this first article also included reflections on the differences within these categories in social situations, attributes associated with them, and the dimensions of contrast discovered within each category (Spradley, 1980). Researchers should avoid limiting their reports to a few 'telling' extracts, but rather need to work through all of their material looking for examples of deviating cases and attempting to analyze ambiguous or contradictory data (Silverman, 2006). Thus, regarding each of the main categories, I also presented cases where adjustment did not occur and identified the conditions for this, paying attention to the instances of contrasting dynamics.

According to Spradley (1980a), while paying attention to detail, it is also important to think of the cultural context as a whole. After performing a more detailed inventory, it is crucial to try to find the connections between domains – cultural themes used by actors within the setting. Themes have a high degree of generality, occurring in many situations across two or more domains. Cultural themes at times can be expressed as mottos, sayings, proverbs, or recurrent expressions (Spradley, 1980a). In the article on cultural adjustment of Finns to the Chinese, one overriding theme, also used as the title, was the expression 'the Chinese will not change; we have to change.'

Furthermore, in analyzing the qualitative data, I also used the method of close reading, noting some striking moments or episodes as they were described or reported. At times, these served as inspiration to consider pursuing a particular theme for an article, such as humour in negotiation. Also, while doing this close reading, I identified recurrent patterns and started to organize the corpus of data under several main discourses (Nikander, 2008). I used this approach for instance when preparing the article on guest–host positioning. It was possible to distinguish two discourses in the observed visits – that of 'China as major superpower' vs. 'Finland as a small country' and 'developed Finland' vs. 'developing China.' These data were consequently used to provide discourse materials and cultural examples of the topic area under study (Alasuutari, 1995). Reflective use of interview materials as discourse data has clear benefits in providing insight into topics and their characteristics in specific cultural contexts (Nikander, 2012).

The method used to organize this material was thick description. Even the most elementary ethnographic writing is extraordinarily 'thick' – 'ethnography is thick description' (Geertz, 1973, p. 9), thus the proper object of cultural analysis is the informal logic of actual life. Instead of causally attributing social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes to culture, we can see culture as context within which these events, behaviours, and processes can be intelligibly, thickly described (Geertz, 1973). During the analysis stage, interview and observation data were categorized according to themes and then combined to provide a thick description of the communication dynamics in the given context. As new categories emerged and the analytic focus developed, each major theme in the data was gradually developed into an article. The adjustment towards the Chinese representatives' expectations, proposed strategies to search for common ground, and guest–host positioning were the primary themes identified in

the corpus of data. The role of humour and aspects related to language were two smaller, more specific themes that were also developed into articles. While equal attention was given to analyzing interview data and observation field notes, in the final result, articles gave the main emphasis on interviews, which appeared to provide more interesting and relevant insights.

According to Spradley (1980a, p. 162), 'a good ethnography shows, a poor one only tells'. When writing my articles, I have attempted to focus on showing by using, as much as possible, original interview quotations and original field-work excerpts. I hope that, in this way, readers can see for themselves the main points I am making and form an impression of what working in co-operation and investment facilitation with China looks like. I focused on specific details, because in an ethnographic approach, the concern with general is incidental to and for the purpose of understanding the specific (Spradley, 1980a).

By analyzing the data from multiple perspectives (article topics), it was possible to observe overarching connections in terms of power and positioning, which yielded new and valuable insights. The thesis of the research project, and its central message, have emerged from the two overriding themes of its component articles. In particular, articles I (on adjustment) and III (guest-host positioning) dealt with power and accommodation, while article II was occupied with the search for common ground. However, in later stages of the dissertation it was possible to see that all of these were connected to the interplay between power and the search for common ground, in some way. At times, power positioning is subordinate to the search for common ground, such as when Finns adjust to the communication style of Chinese representatives. However, at other times power display can come into conflict with finding common ground, such as when Chinese representatives do not show a serious interest in Finland. Power and common ground are not necessarily at odds, but they can be at times. In view of this overall theme and some related insights, I performed another round of data analysis after the articles were complete, while working on the compilation part of the dissertation. In this process, some new categories were developed, such as the five styles of response towards power and common ground; the main findings of all articles were then categorized according to these styles of response. Further, these approaches were conceptualized as a continuum from weakest to strongest in terms of power. This overall analysis of the final results was helpful in drawing different threads together and illustrating them with reference to the data. These findings will be explored in detail in the overall summary and results section.

2.7 Ethical considerations

In this section, I will describe two major ethical considerations - informed consent and protecting the identity of participants, and how these were addressed in my study.

Researchers dealing with human subjects need to find an appropriate balance between giving sufficient information about the research project, but at the same time not affecting research subjects by providing too much detail about the research questions under study (Silverman, 2006). Completely informed consent might be unrealistic; adequately informed consent is therefore a viable alternative. This approach means giving enough information for a person to make a sound decision whether or not to participate (Resnik, 1998). Those interviewed for this study or giving access to observation opportunities were mostly contacted by e-mail. The nature of the study was explained in broad terms, and then the subjects are asked if they are willing to participate. In an observation situation, at the beginning of meetings the persons participating were informed that I was a researcher and would be observing the setting for the study purposes.

Informed consent is a process of negotiation throughout the research project, not just a one-off event at the beginning. It is necessary to return to respondents to obtain their agreement about how data can be used and to make sure that they are sufficiently anonymized (Riessman, *personal correspondence as cited in* Silverman, 2006). Thus, the moment before publication is another occasion when it may be necessary to seek further permission. Attempting to receive some kind of feedback from the people studied is another appropriate ethical goal (Silverman, 2006). When article drafts were undergoing final review and near publication, I contacted participants by e-mail. I gave them the opportunity to see which of their quotes or observation information were to be used, and in what context, and how their identity would be protected. I also gave them the opportunity to comment on ideas expressed in the papers, or correct interpretations derived from their words or actions. It is important to constantly seek the input of those whose practices we try to understand (Carbaugh, 2005). On several occasions, respondents came back with minor clarifications or corrections, but for the most part I received either affirmative responses, such as 'looks good', 'this is very topical', or 'just go on', or no feedback to this communication. For the publication in the 'Asia in Focus' Journal for Young Researchers, it was mandatory for each respondent whose quotations were used to give permission by e-mail. In this case, the response and permission was obtained from each respondent, as needed, which involved contacting some participants several times by multiple means.

I also had a disappointing experience regarding informed consent while seeking access to observation possibilities. The original plan for this study was to have a few months of observation opportunities while doing an internship at the state investment attraction agency. I had e-mailed them several times, giving information about my research project and what I might do for an internship. I received initial agreement from the CEO, and made a trip from China back to Finland for this purpose. However, upon presenting the informed consent document, the CEO changed his mind and decided not to let me into the agency. This decision was apparently motivated by his fear that competitors would learn about the working methods of this agency, and a desire to protect

the business interests of its customers. I attempted to explain that I would not reveal the identities of people or of companies, and that the articles would only be published years after the period observed, further increasing the distance from sensitive matters. However, his decision remained unchanged. Proper ethical conduct sometimes means that valuable research opportunities might be lost and access not granted. The principle of informed consent also means that people must not be pressured to participate in the study (Silverman, 2006), if for whatever reason they choose not to.

In addition to considering how to incorporate informed consent throughout the research process, the researcher must continually address the question of how to ensure the confidentiality of informants (Spradley, 1980a). When reporting observations or interviews, common sense requires that the identities of study participants be protected. Such protection is needed even if studied matters do not seem particularly delicate (Silverman, 2006). Ethnographic research is always invasive into the lives of its subjects to a certain extent, and the information gained can be used to affirm their interests and sensitivities or to violate them (Spradley, 1980a).

When starting to prepare the articles, at first, I protected the identity of research subjects by referring to them either by their gender and occupation or their nationality in the text. However, before publishing the first paper, I was asked by the reviewers to establish a more consistent, professional system of references. Thus, each interview subject was given a code, and reviewers also suggested that there should be at least three characteristics associated with each code. They felt that it is important for readers to have some association of who is saying what. The characteristics chosen were country of origin, gender, and the position at the organization (Table 2 in the section on interviews). Abiding by the Guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012), personal information about the informants cited in the articles was otherwise kept to a minimum. The cities where the research was carried out and the types of organizations engaged were identified in the introductory section. It cannot be claimed that full anonymity was achieved; with the information provided, the identity of some informants could potentially be uncovered. However, this level of detail was required for publication, and agreement was therefore obtained from participants to use the data and quotations cited. The only concern voiced by several participants was that their name should not appear in the publications.

To conclude, while approaching the ethical aspects of this study, I have tried to maintain a balance between the interests of my research, the wishes of participants, and the requirements of publishers. Social contexts are situational; therefore, not every situation can be covered by ethical guidelines. One should always be aware of emerging ethical issues and manage them as best as one can (Silverman, 2006), in the awareness that questions in ethics do not have simple and straightforward answers (Resnik, 1998).

3 SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS OF THE RE-SEARCH ARTICLES

3.1 Description of general context regarding Chinese-Finnish co-operation

To provide a general understanding of the key findings of each article, this section will consider some elements of the context studied. A thick description at industry and organizational levels for each institution involved appeared unnecessary, since the phenomena under study involved too many different actors. This fact rendered the data somewhat fragmented, as it drew from various contexts of both visiting delegations and more routine office work. Also, it was necessary to consider the confidentiality of the organizations involved and their working practices, as was made quite clear in various interactions during the interviews and participant observation. Therefore, it appeared more appropriate to provide descriptions the main aspects of Chinese-Finnish economic co-operation in general. To do so, several elements of the SPEAKING model developed by Hymes (1974) will be considered in this section. The model distinguishes the Setting and Scene, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. While all components of the SPEAKING model are important, in certain settings two or three of them predominate (Hymes, 1974). The context studied is so broad at a general that only the first three elements are emphasized: Setting and Scene, Participants, and Ends. While describing these elements, the section provides general information about Chinese-Finnish co-operation, to contextualize the results of the study. Quotations from interviews and observation fieldnotes will be used to offer more tangible details.

Setting is about the time and place of the speech act and its other physical circumstances (Hymes, 1974). The setting of Finnish–Chinese investment attraction, trade, and co-operation initiatives is broad – it involves delegation visits from China to Finland and from Finland to China, matchmaking events, media visits for promotional purposes, and everyday work in the office when

contact between partners is mostly maintained by phone, e-mail, or Skype. At the level of local government, the investment facilitation activities are at times difficult to separate from broader co-operation in the framework of town twinning.

Regarding the spatial dimension of the setting, the physical distance between parties is an important factor. In the words of one interview subject:

China is further away, so if you see China as a partner, you have to count on the distance as well, how to manage that, and how to meet people face to face (IV8).

At the same time, the obstacles created by physical distance have recently been decreasing, as pointed out by IV9:

We are benefitting a lot from the everyday airline connections that Finnair has organized with the main cities in China and even with several mid-size cities in China. Then Finland seems to be kind of close to China, in terms of flights at least - if you are in Helsinki, from Shanghai it is the shortest way to Europe.

Next, the Scene represents the 'psychological setting', as measured for instance by the degree of formality, or sense of play or seriousness (Hymes, 1974). In the context of co-operation facilitation and promotion activities, the scene varies depending on what kind of group is visiting and how long those involved have known each other. As broadly summarized by IV9,

with the governmental meetings, there is a certain kind of conduct code you are following and it is pretty formal. With venture capitalists it is more informal, and when it comes to the team, it's totally informal. When you know the person well and get into a closer relationship, then you can be a bit informal and bring humour into discussion as well.

The degree of formality is sometimes reflected in the clothing style of certain groups, according to IV2:

The government personnel, they usually dress in suits. The journalists, on the other hand, are very casual, they seldom dress suit, so usually they give people [a] very casual feel.

Regarding the participants in this setting, they are typically Finnish or Chinese, but could also include other nationalities working in this field. A special in-between group, which several interviewees represented, consisted of Chinese participants who have lived in Finland for a considerable period of time and who are working for co-operation from the Finnish side. Regarding the professions involved, on the Finnish side there are CEOs, managers, officials and employees of state, regional, and local institutions, and interpreters. On the Chinese side, the main participants are central, provincial, or local government officials and employees, venture capitalists, journalists, and interpreters.

The ends of a communicative situation are its purposes, goals, and outcomes (Hymes, 1974). From the Finnish perspective, one of the goals is the attraction of Chinese capital to Finland and promoting Finnish companies. However, the expected outcome may also include broader co-operation that results in long-term mutual benefits. In the words of IV1,

investment attraction is one of the goals, but we don't say it very loud to the Chinese side. I think that the better way of approaching is the 'mutual benefit'. We don't just start shouting that we want your investments. Of course, the long-term goal is to get some investment here as well, but it is not the first agenda we communicate to the Chinese, we say that we want mutual co-operation and mutual benefits.

IV8 expressed it this way: 'concrete, concrete outcomes - that is what we hope to see'. Regarding promotional visits, the Finnish side hopes that 'Chinese journalists write the articles and give some positive feedback about Finland' (IV2). Chinese representatives, on the other hand, are looking for investment markets, but are also interested in technology transfer, for instance, and in exchange programmes to train their personnel. As one of the Chinese officials said during the delegation visit observed, 'the government strongly supports co-operation with foreign countries, and the technology transfer is currently a burning and worrying issue'. In his opinion, foreign co-operation currently receives the most attention from local government.

Now that the main aspects of the communicative context – setting and scene, participants, and ends for Chinese-Finnish co-operation – have been considered, the next sections will move into a more detailed examination of the themes in the qualitative data that were developed into articles.

3.2 "The Chinese will not change, we have to change:" adjustment of the Finns to the Chinese in a Chinese investment facilitation context

This section summarizes the first article included in this dissertation (Stopniece, 2017b). The article explores one of the themes that emerged as I analyzed the empirical data of my research project: the adjustment of Finns to Chinese communication and working styles in the context of Chinese investment facilitation. This paper is mainly based on data obtained from interviewing representatives of Finland and observations of visits by delegations.

The Positioning Theory developed by Harré (1991) was my point of departure in exploring the power dynamics between Chinese and Finnish representatives. The dominant discursive practice used by Finns to attract Chinese investment was to accommodate Chinese communication and working styles. The results suggest that 'rising China' discourse becomes part of a narrative frame for Finns working to encourage Chinese investment. Consequently, Finns are taking into account, and adjusting towards, a communication style they see

as characteristically Chinese. Positions tend to be taken up according to an unfolding narrative based on the outcomes they generate, and the current narrative is that of China becoming a global power, accompanied by Finland's desire for continued economic success. This positioning has apparently emerged recently, as Finns have become more interested in attracting Chinese investments and in co-operation in general. People tend to take care of relationships when they are important for achieving economic goals (Isotalus, 2006). All sellers are understood by Isotalus to exercise less power in negotiation than do buyers (Isotalus, 2004). In the context of investment, Finns are predominantly in the position of selling (or marketing) assets, services or products to China, which puts pressure on them to adapt and conform to Chinese ways of doing business.

This pattern of adjustment was evident in several dynamics of co-operation work: adjustment to the Chinese concepts of time, indirect communication, and overt hierarchy. These adaptations follow traditional characterizations of cultural differences discussed in previous studies, for instance, the concepts of polychronic versus monochronic time and high versus low context (Hall, 1983), and that of power distance (Hofstede, 1980). These findings can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, it appears that the traditional elements in communication may still matter, as they were not only referred to in interviews, but also identified during participant observation. For instance, Chinese representatives would often take seats at the table according to hierarchy and *feng shui* principles. Second, interviews can produce talk that is informed by cultural dichotomies and stereotypes, particularly as both the researcher and the interview subjects work in intercultural communication and have been reading and learning about these possible differences. During data analysis, such categories may also be the easiest ones to notice. Adjustment to the Chinese concept of time, indirectness, and overt hierarchy may seem to be commonplaces identified in previous research, but utilizing these notions can also be justified by their use by the participants in the study. This was the first article produced from the dissertation research, and it was easier to start off by considering cultural differences encountered in the context of investment attraction and adjustment as the way to bridge them. While the starting point was two national groups – Finns and Chinese – in retrospect, the organizational and structural positioning of interlocutors may explain the situation better. For instance, several of those interviewed were Chinese nationals working for Finnish organizations who also needed to adjust to visitors from China.

The article also considered possible differences between groups involved in investment attraction from the Chinese side. According to interviewees, some groups, such as government officials, showed continued adherence to traditional Chinese values, while Chinese venture capitalists accommodated global trends to a larger extent. It appears that venture capitalists have mostly already undergone a dynamic, multidimensional, and interdependent process of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 1995) and have an emergent cultural identity – they have often studied abroad, speak English fluently, and are immersing them-

selves in Western materialism (Chuang, 2004). Therefore, in some ways at least, they appear easier for Finnish representatives to work with.

Positions are derived from patterns of similar beliefs held by members in a relatively coherent speech community (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003a). Finnish participants did not see 'rising China' as a dominant competitor to be feared, but rather focused on opportunities related to China and on developing cooperative relationships (Louis, 2008). They saw their work, especially in the China Finland Golden Bridge, as a customer service operation, which might require them to tolerate a lack of confirmation and last-minute changes that would not generally be considered good business etiquette. In some situations, these Finnish representatives could adopt an uncritical 'customer is always right' attitude, which can be explained by the competitive environment in which investment promotion agencies operate. Finland has many initiatives to attract Chinese investment, and tends to follow the model of its Eastern European neighbours, offering strong investment facilitation incentives (Schüler-Zhou *et al.*, 2012). Thus, it can be argued that even developed European countries, if they experience an economic downturn or are small or peripheral, may be encouraged to put serious effort into Chinese investment facilitation and adjust to the communication and working style of the Chinese partners.

There were also observed deviations from this discursive positioning. Occasionally, Finnish representatives spoke of maintaining their way of doing things: for instance, maintaining Finnish work-time culture (not working evenings or weekends), speaking directly when their straightforward talk was accepted by the Chinese, or paying less attention to hierarchy when encountering a less traditional Chinese group, such as venture capitalists. Positioning may involve shifts in power, shifts in degrees of access, and offering a chance to choose between different lines of action (Davies & Harré, 1990). Thus, Chinese power is not absolute in a negotiation setting. The Finnish side also has power, occasionally choosing to stand up to Chinese expectations and deploying other stances of power when required. Where is the limit to appropriate adjustment, and how is it determined? Group cohesiveness and organizational values are apparently one guiding principle for navigating the search for common ground in relation to power positioning. It appears that, in some instances, there was a kind of consensus in how far Finns would go to accommodate the Chinese and when they would stick to their own values and ways of working. There could also be cost-benefit considerations: when associated transaction costs are too high, their own power is asserted. At times it may be done at the expense of creating common ground, as in the case of refusing to work on weekends. Adjustment was also determined by need; for instance, with traditional Chinese government officials the need to adjust was strong, but with venture capitalists, it was not so necessary and therefore negotiation appeared easier. There was a hint of Chinese adjustment as well, however, in particular when it was said that they could accept Finnish honesty and directness on some occasions. This study demonstrates how distinct discourses can coexist, compete, and create multiple versions of reality. It also shows that communication is strategic and influenced

by power dynamics. Due to data collection limitations in Finland, the voice of Finnish participants is stronger in this research project as a whole, and there is an imbalance in the representation of the case (even the Chinese-born participants interviewed were employed by the Finnish side). The perceptions of the participants may be ethnocentric at times, and their interpretations can themselves be seen as a part of power positioning.

In retrospect, it is evident that this article was not only about power positioning but also concerned the search for common ground. In this analysis I uncovered and drew attention to the predominant way the Finnish side aimed to create common ground with Chinese representatives, which in this case is done by adjusting to them. However, while focusing mostly on the strategy of adjustment, the paper also mentions incidents where one's own power position is also asserted, insisting on one's own way of doing things.

In conclusion, the inter-relationship between the search for common ground and power positioning, in the case of adjustment, is that one willingly chooses a weaker power position. However, when asserting one's own autonomy, power positioning becomes more important and may pre-empt the search for common ground. Where there is not much need for adjustment, the existing common ground is used and power positions become equal or neutral. This interpretation reflects the insights derived already from article II (Stopniece, 2015), but in retrospect, it is applicable to the first article as well, especially regarding Finns negotiating with venture capitalists who tended to be less traditional.

3.3 China Finland co-operation, trade and investment: in search of common ground

This section presents a summary of article II included in this study (Stopniece, 2015). This article explored another major theme in the empirical data collected for this study – challenges and possible solutions arising in the search for common ground in Chinese–Finnish co-operation, trade, and investment. Based on interviews with Finnish representatives and observing visiting delegations, this paper explores the difficulties that Finns experienced in moving past a general and limited level of interest in Finland by Chinese representatives and presents suggested solutions to encourage a more specific continuation of co-operation.

The Speech Codes Theory formulated by Philipsen (1997), and the notion of common ground elaborated by Stalnaker (1999), form the theoretical basis of this paper. Its results illustrate how a lack of serious interest, vague or restrictive government regulations, the long time needed to build relationships, and the involvement of intermediaries are all factors that may prevent talks from developing past a general level.

The article suggests strategies to more effectively find common ground and to focus co-operation talks on specific objectives. These approaches include presenting areas of Finnish expertise and matching those with Chinese needs, making use of the pragmatism seen as a common characteristic of both cultures, and investing in building the necessary connections and relationships.

The difficulties involved in moving past a general level of interest by the Chinese were a cause of frustration to Finnish participants; the slow rate of actual outcomes was not what they had expected. Proposition four of the Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005) states that interlocutors tend to interpret communicative conduct according to the practices prevalent in their own culture. For example, on a co-operation visit, Finns apparently presuppose that the Chinese are interested in actual, concrete, and efficient co-operation. While this may indeed be the case, in some situations this may not be a shared goal, or its achievement may not be possible due to certain considerations of the Chinese partners. Interview data suggested that at times the Finns may have taken the common ground of interest in actual co-operation for granted, while it may turned out that Chinese representatives only wanted to gain a general impression of Finland and its potential. The indirect style of Chinese communication is partly accommodated, while Finns attempt to 'read' from non-verbal cues whether their counterparts are seriously interested. There are also efforts to extend common ground by applying some pressure to the Chinese to be more direct, about possible areas of co-operation for instance. True co-operation requires that mutual interests exist and be communicated to the other partner. However, based on the evidence, it may be possible to make the other interested during the interaction. Apparently, lack of interest is not fixed, but can rather be a kind of starting point for something that had not initially been given serious consideration. Preconceptions change in the process of visiting and interaction.

A number of factors may contribute to the general level of Chinese interest regarding co-operation and to the fact that co-operation talks are often relatively superficial. Some study participants explained the lack of specific focus as arising from indirectness, an important value in traditional Chinese culture. They believed this aspect is involved in not clearly communicating a lack of serious interest and in drafting only vague plans for co-operation. In addition, it could be that the Confucian distinction between in-group and out-group plays a role in the need for more time to build relationships (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Ock Yum, 1997). It appears that in some groups, such as central, provincial, and local government officials, traditional Chinese values still seem to be strong, and these may be involved to some degree when intentions are not clearly communicated and when relationship-building comes before the establishment of project goals and objectives. Though this explanation is clearly plausible, I do not want to overgeneralize or place too much confidence in it, especially since most informants were Finns and it was not possible to interview Chinese visitors.

Similar behaviours may also appear in contexts where a Confucian background is not a factor. Questions related to direct and indirect communication are complex and contextually bound. Some interviewees said that Chinese venture capitalists tend to be more task-oriented and direct than government officials, which turns the attention to differences between various professional groups within one national context and the possible existence of multiple speech codes in the same society.

Finnish representatives cannot directly influence the factors contributing to the fundamental level of Chinese interest, but they shared efforts to deal with this by making the co-operation talks more specific. In particular, to be considered more seriously for actual co-operation, the interview subjects said that it was helpful to present Finnish areas of expertise and match them with Chinese needs. The interviewees have observed the Chinese to be pragmatic people; if they see actual gains, things will start to happen. When common areas of interest are identified, it is possible to make use of pre-existing common ground between parties, such as the practicality and pragmatism characteristic of both Finnish and Chinese working cultures. At least in part, the historical origins of these can be traced back to the Confucian heritage in the case of China, and the Protestant work ethic in the case of Finland. While the origins of the working cultures are different, it appears that there are similarities, which can result in a joint speech code between parties. This finding could have practical relevance for business actors and would be worth further investigation for practical applications.

Regarding the long time required to build relationships with Chinese representatives, the Finnish approach to this is, in part, strategic. They attempt to have more visits to China, more Chinese institutions in Finland, and try to move more easily to the business-to-business or professional level, all of which might help to speed up the process. However, acceptance of the need to invest time and effort in building relationships was also expressed in interviews, suggesting that some adaptation is also necessary to extend common ground with the Chinese. Proposition six of the Speech Codes Theory suggests that speech codes frame responses according to ways that are socially accepted. There is strong evidence that people experience social pressure to conform their behaviour to the codes of their own societies (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005). People working from the Finnish perspective are facing the double pressure to accommodate the needs of their own culture in terms of directness, effectiveness, and the results expected from them, but at the same time, to some degree at least, to adjust to the 'Chinese way' of doing things, which may require patience and time.

The proposed strategy employed by the Finnish representatives to extend common ground thus contains elements of pressure, taking advantage of existing common ground, and adjustment to Chinese expectations. This study suggests that the most effective way to increase the common ground involves a combination of finding and making use of existing common ground, exerting pressure on the other side to accept 'your way' to some degree, and adapting part of 'the other's way' as one's own. The article demonstrates how different

positioning factors are addressed with different strategies. For instance, disinterest by Chinese representatives is met by presenting areas of expertise in Finland and matching those with Chinese needs, making reference to the pragmatism characteristic of both cultures as common ground, and addressing difficulties in relationship building by investing in necessary connections for a longer term co-operation. However, the same factor can also be addressed with different responses in different contexts. For instance, indirectness was one of the cultural categories that appeared in article I (Stopniece, 2017b) as something to adjust to when working with China. Interestingly, in article II (Stopniece, 2015), indirectness by Chinese representatives appeared again, but this time Finnish representatives expected Chinese representatives to be more direct in answering their questions. In retrospect, this paper deals with power too; in the search for common ground, the Finnish side may employ power to put some pressure on the Chinese, which is an active strategy both in terms of power and common ground.

Article II of this dissertation presents a more complex picture of the approaches used towards common ground and power than article I. It reveals how these are not merely related to working culture and choosing to adjust or refraining from adjustment, but recognizes that there can be elements of constructive pressure and that an initial, disinterested position can be changed in the process of interaction. Approaches towards common ground and power are chosen with pragmatic goals in mind to achieve some tangible results in the domain of investment attraction, trade, or co-operation. While the article emphasized the search for common ground, it also drew attention to actions pursuing a wider spectrum of responses towards power positioning. Here, to make sure that common ground is found, the strongest power positioning actions were employed to exert pressure on the other side to act in a certain way. This dynamic can be related to the concept of hedging, the use of something between 'hard' and 'soft' power to promote one's interests. Hedging aims to meet one's own needs while trying to maintain a favourable relationship with the interlocutor, typically one holding a higher overall position of power (Salman & Geeraerts, 2015a; 2016). It appeared that hedging was more typical strategy on the Finnish side, which in the investment attraction context generally holds a less advantageous power position. Here, in contrast to autonomous manifestations of power, the actor is clearly interested in using power to establish common ground. Regarding article I (Stopniece, 2017b), in retrospect an instance was noted when pressure was exerted by Finnish representatives, namely about Chinese confirmation of the visit. An autonomous power strategy, while asserting one's own power, allows the common ground to suffer. This was well illustrated by the Chinese lack of interest in real co-operation when being in Finland for something more like a recreational visit. Using existing common ground was another strategy that appeared during the analysis of the second article; this is neutral in terms of power positioning, involving equality while being favourable for common ground and co-operation. Adjustment, which appeared

in both articles, usually comes at some cost to one or both parties and requires lowering one's power position.

Finnish representatives extended common ground through such approaches as applying pressure, utilizing existing common ground, and adjusting towards Chinese expectations, all of which are active strategies aimed at engaging with Chinese partners. The stance of autonomy was more typically used by Chinese representatives, asserting their power while demonstrating a lack of interest in co-operation. It can be inferred that the Chinese may be powerful enough to afford to explore possibilities generally without specific goals, while the Finns need to make things happen and obtain practical results. Applying some pressure signifies the potential power of the Finnish side to change and affect course of action, eventually igniting Chinese interest. Still, the intensity of the Finnish side about co-operation stands in stark contrast to the apparent indifference sometimes shown by Chinese representatives. None of the active strategies are applicable for use at all times; depending on specific conditions, their effectiveness may vary. It appears that the Finnish side is using a combination of them all while aiming at maximum effectiveness.

3.4 Chinese 'enormous hospitality' versus Finnish 'meeting among friends:' guest-host positioning in China Finland delegation visits

This section summarizes article III included in this dissertation (Stopniece, 2017a), which explores another emergent theme. When I analyzed the qualitative data collected for this research project, I observed contrasting varieties in guest–host positioning for visiting delegations in the context of China–Finland investment, trade, and co-operation facilitation.

An important part of investment facilitation and wider economic co-operation comprises visits by delegations representing each of the nations involved to the other country. These visits feature enterprise interest matchmaking events, meetings with officials, company visits, etc. Based on interview and observation data, this paper elaborates on how the phenomena related to power positioning, common ground and accommodation between Finnish and Chinese representatives were manifest for visiting delegations. This article builds on the Positioning Theory developed by Harré (1991), which involves the need to attend to local moral orders and is centred on the view that the local distribution of rights and duties motivates different actions and influences the way episodes unfold. As potential investors, Chinese partners now yield a new kind of power, which affects intercultural communication between the parties. However, the discourse of 'China as a developing country' is also present in certain contexts. Local hosting culture and the roles of guest or host add additional variety and complexity to the dynamics of negotiation. The presence of various discursive positioning elements is analyzed in such aspects as preconceived

attitudes, initial visiting impressions, self-presentation, style of reception, and provision of food.

Based on the results of this study, the variety of the guest-host power positioning scenarios could be classified along the following main dimensions – ‘China as a rising global power’ versus ‘Finland as a small country,’ ‘Finland as a developed country’ versus ‘China as a developing country,’ Chinese ‘overwhelming hospitality’ versus Finnish ‘meeting among friends,’ and the ‘power of the host’ versus ‘the awkwardness of the visitor’. Preconceived power positioning can shift even in the course of a single visit, as in the case of a Finn going to an imagined, traditional ‘developing’ China and then being overwhelmed by its urbanization and rapid development.

This article affirms the idea that discourse is essential for the construction of the ideas, social processes, and phenomena making up the social world (Nikander, 2008). Thus, such discourses as ‘China as a global power’ versus ‘Finland as a small country’ or ‘Finland as a developed country’ versus ‘China as a developing country’ are resources that coexist and are present simultaneously, taking turns and being made manifest in different situations. It appears that when visiting Finland, Chinese confront more directly the reality that Finland is a developed country, while Finns face the reality of China’s scale and its status as a rising global power when visiting there. Thus, the location of the visit tends to shift the power dynamics in favour of the host country. It can also be claimed that the narrative framing depends on the roles of the delegation members and the purpose of the visit. When a Chinese delegation visits Finland as potential investors, the discourse of ‘rising China’ will be very present, just as happens when Finns go to China to sell their products and promote their companies in China’s rapidly expanding markets. However, if a Chinese delegation has come to learn from Finns, and the Chinese are interested in technology transfer, the dominant discourse will be that of Finland as a developed and China as a developing country. In such cases, Finland is in a powerful position as an advanced country with a well-established influence in several cutting-edge technologies. Occasionally, issues seen ‘on the ground’ in China, such as pollution and the loss of historical heritage, may reinforce its image as a developing country in the eyes of Finnish representatives.

The role of guest or host adds an additional layer to the power dynamics between partners. According to Isotalus (2006), the host tends to be in a more powerful position than the guest. The data of this study also showed the hosting nation to feel more powerful in most cases, and the agenda and activities of the visit followed by the guest normally depend on the host. Guests may even feel awkward at first due to their unfamiliarity with the local norms. While the position of the host represents a customer service relationship to the guest, it also exerts significant power on what is to happen and the norms of communication, in regard to the dictum to ‘when in Rome, do as Romans do’. While not all Romans do the same thing, at least on the level of perception the local ways of doing things tend to affect the visitors. Host duties include making logistical arrangements and providing food, which is a key opportunity to communicate

local culture and customs. If that results in positive experiences, the local culture can amount to a form of 'soft power', elevating the power position of the host country in the eyes of the guest.

Finnish participants in this study occasionally mentioned the importance of the norm of equality when doing business; in some sense they want to feel relaxed and on equal footing when hosting, making the arrangements simple and friendly. Indeed, being equal and utilizing existing common ground is a potentially viable approach to power positioning. However, this idea of equality may be specific to Finnish culture in this context, but is less familiar to their Chinese partners. 'Meeting friends' involves equality, and Finns appeared to insist on this interpretation of the visiting situation, but there is little indication that Chinese representative saw matters in the same way.

Through overwhelming displays of generosity and hospitality, Chinese hosts may also engage in a form of power display, maintaining their 'face' in front of the guest. This involves something of a power paradox – an action could represent serving and showing off at the same time. Hosting another well shows recognition and honour to the guest, while demonstrating one's own power, generosity, and resources. This suggests that one's power position can actually be enhanced by serving the other. Regarding the provision of food for the Finns, the Chinese offered their own food when hosting and expected Finnish representatives to adjust. Thus, the local cultural norms of hosting also have some impact on the power dynamics. Referring to the fourth proposition of the Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005), interacting sides tend to interpret communicative conduct according to the practices prevalent in their own culture. For the Finnish side the grandeur of being welcomed in China can feel almost uncomfortable, while the arrangements in Finland seemed too simple for some Chinese representatives. Thus, it appears that a 'soft power' approach may not be mutually accepted or constructive in this case. On the other hand, the potentially extravagant restaurant arrangements in China were also liked by Finnish representatives at times, so participant responses also can be different depending on the situation.

While this study could trace some patterns of what tends to happen in visiting situations, a variety of scenarios is also apparent depending on each individual. Culturally available stereotypes are understood differently by each speaker, and therefore each of their contributions in conversations will also vary among different occasions (Davies & Harré, 1990). One example of these individual approaches was whether to provide Chinese guests in Finland with Finnish food, insisting on their adjustment, or rather to accommodate them by offering food at a Chinese restaurant.

The duty of guests may include self-introduction, whereby one may experience anxiety and vulnerability because their intentions may not be understood. This is especially true for those visiting the other country for the first time. For instance, the fact that the Chinese in China may not be familiar with Finland and may see the scale of its population or economy as ridiculously small may make Finns feel uncomfortable. Chinese representatives, on the other hand,

may feel other sources of insecurity, for instance, regarding local norms and the perceptions of their purposes for visiting.

Still, the narrative of China as a powerful country on the world stage is visible in several aspects of guest–host positioning. Posing the question, in Finland, where or what China is, would be ridiculous. However, when Finnish representatives go to China, this kind of explanation regarding Finland can be very relevant and necessary. Likewise, Chinese normally would not consider offering Finns Finnish food when visiting China; in most places, there would be no Finnish restaurants anywhere nearby. However, when Chinese delegations visit Finland, offering food at a Chinese restaurant is a viable alternative to the option of offering local food.

To sum up, positioning in visiting situations is influenced by the discourses of participants, the location of the visit, the cultural styles of hosting, and the roles participants take in a particular situation. This positioning is inherently subjective, so it is not possible to evaluate how ‘correct’ anyone’s perceptions are, but simply recognize that they exist and affect interactions. The complex layering of contrasting discourses, the roles and purposes of those involved, the location and situational context of these encounters all contribute to the unfolding of power dynamics between Chinese and Finnish representatives. Most of these factors would not be unique to these specific partners, and certainly this is not an exhaustive list of factors affecting such positioning and accommodation. While the most generally applicable dimension of positioning is that of guest and host, the two power discourses – big vs. small and developed vs. developing – could be relevant for some other comparatively small developed countries. The most specific Chinese–Finnish positioning dimension I uncovered in this study is the one chosen as the title of the article: ‘overwhelming hospitality’ vs. ‘meeting among friends.’

This article of the dissertation reveals, in the most sophisticated way thus far, the complexity of factors influencing power dynamics in these negotiations. Beginning the analysis with the guest–host prism has proved fruitful and revealing. Normally, the side possessing power also has something desirable to offer. ‘Rising China’ has opportunities to offer associated with its assets, markets, and dynamism, while ‘developed Finland’ offers experience, knowledge, and expertise. Although these factors could work to balance one another, these discourses seldom appear to cross each other, but rather they exist more as separate narratives appearing in different contexts. The other factors playing out in the power dynamic, such as the roles of guest or host and different hosting traditions of each country, direct analytical attention to the complexity of positioning. Individual preconceptions were also discussed in the paper; for instance, Finnish representatives may differ in how they see China in its current stage of development, which often depends on their previous experience and access to information.

While the two previous papers (Stopniec, 2017b; 2015) concentrated on power positioning and the search for common ground beginning with the roles of seller and buyer, this article brings the roles of guest and host to centre stage.

Since visiting each other is such an essential part of negotiating and rarely occurs on completely neutral ground, it can be claimed that the guest–host dimension is very important for understanding power positioning phenomena. While in the first two papers, the ‘rising China’ narrative tended to be the main reference point, in this article, it became clear that the narrative of China as a developing country is still relevant in some situations. Within this narrative, for the first time in this study, China was clearly in a weaker position in relation to Finland. It was also evident that Chinese representatives accept this and are prepared to learn from Finns in certain situations, which demonstrates the importance of these reversed power positions. Developing vs. developed country tends to be the “old” narrative and ‘rising China’ the ‘new’ or ‘renewed’ narrative. In some areas, the ‘developing country’ narrative appears especially relevant, such as in the context of high technologies and government policies.

Negative stereotypes about the other party obviously weaken efforts to establish common ground and result in exaggerated interpretations of one’s own power. Chinese may see Finland as too small and insignificant to engage seriously in co-operation, while Finns may see China as an unstable or unreliable developing economy. More often than not, such stereotypes motivate representatives to take an autonomous approach involving little serious interest in co-operation.

The third article in this dissertation has contributed one additional form of approach regarding power positioning and the search for common ground, namely the concept of ‘soft power’. Nevertheless, the main focus of the paper was to identify various factors impacting power positioning.

3.5 The simple and the complex nature of humour and laughter in Chinese-Finnish negotiations

This section presents a summary of article IV included in this dissertation (Stopniece, 2016a). This short article explores a narrower theme that emerged in the empirical data of this research project: humour and laughter in Chinese–Finnish negotiations.

Humour and laughter can also be seen as sites of the search for common ground and power positioning in the context of Finnish–Chinese co-operation. This paper was mainly based on data obtained while interviewing individuals who work in Finland either for local government or one of the state agencies responsible for attracting foreign investment. The article uses the Positioning Theory developed by Harré (1991) and the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) to analyze expressions of humour between Finnish and Chinese representatives. Humour and laughter are seen to be integral to co-operation and sometimes assist directly in finding common ground and improving the atmosphere of meetings. From the participants’ answers, an interpretation gradually emerged that humour in Finnish–Chinese co-operation

negotiations can also be experienced as a complicated domain, since it can touch on sensitive areas and draw upon different approaches to interaction, appropriateness of topics and styles of joking. Perceived cultural differences in the sense of humour and the complexities of Chinese 'face' may render use of humour during negotiations difficult. According to study data, representatives of both nationalities make adjustments in their style of humour for the sake of co-operation. However, power positioning and autonomy were also asserted simultaneously with the use of humour.

To explain the 'simple' nature of humour in more detail, laughing can ease the tension when participants feel somewhat nervous upon meeting each other, for instance. Laughing and humour can be seen as a universal language that is very helpful in the context of considerable uncertainty. In such situations, jokes appear to draw from contrasting national stereotypes, such as 'large China', 'cold Finland', spicy food in China, and drinking too much in Finland. These jokes may serve a purpose of self-introduction or showing what you know about the other side and, as such, represent an effort to bridge perceived cultural differences and create common ground.

Observation and interview data suggest that both sides tried to adjust their ways of joking to their perception of the other side's expectations. For example, Chinese representatives might force themselves to joke while negotiating, and Finns learned about the specifics of the Chinese sense of humour and tried to adjust to that. Both of these phenomena show an effort to use humour to create common ground. The adjustment may also have to do with the location of the visit: if the Chinese had arrived as visitors, they may think that they need to adjust to the local norms of negotiation, and their behaviour may reflect their beliefs about what humour would look like in Finland.

There are, however, cultural differences in senses of humour, which may make it complicated to use it for building common ground. The fact that English is not the native language of either party makes it more likely that a joke may not be understood. The sensitivity of Chinese 'face' represented a specific area of difference and difficulty described by the interviewees in detail. However, Finnish participants implied that their Chinese counterparts could laugh at themselves in the context of their own boastful jokes. Laughing at the Finnish weakness of heavy drinking, and at the small population of Finland was observed and reported by informants.

Although the Finnish representatives mostly saw humour as a site of searching for common ground, they also mentioned that occasionally Chinese representatives could engage in humorous power play. It can be assumed that sometimes the autonomous 'face' needs to be accommodated (Brown & Levinson, 1987), asserting power over common ground. Hints of the autonomy represented by 'face' could be found in joking about others, boasting humorously, and being reluctant to laugh at oneself. When they boast, communicators assign certain roles to themselves and to others; in this case, Chinese representatives may indicate that China holds more power than Finland. The importance of 'face' to the Chinese could be seen as an area where sensitivity to power rela-

tions is made explicit: one does not want to appear weak or inappropriate. Hence, national stereotypes do not always have neutral meaning in humour; jokes about the size of China could be an aspect of power positioning, just as laughing at the Finnish tendency towards excessive drinking could indicate a desire to show national superiority. At the same time, the 'face' of affiliation may be manifest in Chinese attempts to adjust and joke during negotiations, even to the point of leaving their 'comfort zones'. When using humour as a means of expression, finding a balance between the needs of autonomy and affiliation appears to be a complex endeavour.

Referring to the connection between humour and play suggested by Boyd (2004), this paper also concludes that humour may encompass playful expressions of power; it involves power positioning in a playful way. Positions tend to be taken up according to an unfolding narrative depending on the outcomes they generate (Davies & Harré, 1990). Adjustments in humour occur in hopes of reaping the benefits from finding common ground, but in certain situations, personal autonomy and power may also be asserted.

This article addressed a comparatively narrow theme in the data collected, humour, which turned out to be a rewarding aspect to consider. In the overall development of the analysis regarding responses towards power and common ground, it contributed and strengthened my understanding of autonomy as a stance taken during negotiations. Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), with its concepts of affiliation and autonomy of 'face' needs, was used in this paper for the first time in the entire dissertation. Thus, the topic of humour facilitated additional insight into 'face' considerations as a factor influencing power positioning. Boasting and sensitivity to 'face' concerns suggest that humour may involve more of a playful power dynamic for Chinese representatives, while the Finnish side chiefly puts its effort into using humour to find common ground. Emerging insights into the role of humour in power positioning and the search for common ground enriched my understanding of these phenomena as observed in the context of negotiations.

3.6 Language as a site of search for common ground and power positioning in Chinese-Finnish investment facilitation

This section summarizes article V included in this dissertation (Stopniece, 2016b). This paper explores a specific theme in the empirical data collected for this research project: language-related aspects of Chinese–Finnish negotiations.

The article considers how the role of language is perceived in Finnish–Chinese co-operation and investment facilitation and what their language-choices means in the context of negotiations specifically. In particular, the article considers how language underpins the search for common ground and is connected to power positioning. This paper is based on the same data set as previous articles and builds on the Positioning Theory developed by Harré

(1991) and the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) when analyzing the informants' understandings of the use of language in the context of co-operation. It was not possible to explore this topic in very much depth due to the limited amount of data (especially of direct observation), however, enough evidence was collected to examine language choices from several perspectives and to draw some conclusions.

English is most often used as a *lingua franca* in Chinese–Finnish investment facilitation. While Finns use it directly, Chinese representatives often resort to employing an interpreter, especially in the case of central or local government officials who are mature in age. This pattern was evident in meetings held both in Finland and in China. Venture capitalists would often use English directly and tended to be younger than government officials. Thus, two tendencies appear in language choices by Chinese representatives: more proficient use of English by venture capitalists, but in other contexts, stronger assertion of Mandarin Chinese by government officials. Direct use of English could be interpreted not only as a matter of ability or an in-group marker (for venture capitalists, or younger Chinese), but also as an emphasis on common ground. The use of Chinese sometimes reflected a lack of English skills, but other factors also affected language choices. As representatives of a large nation with a long history, Chinese may insist more on using their own language on official occasions and adjusting less to others. 'Face' considerations, hierarchical thinking, and a preference for mediated communication may also encourage the use of interpreters. Using Mandarin can be interpreted as indication of the autonomy imperatives for 'face', and also reflect power positioning according to the narrative of China as a rising global power. Finnish representatives at the state investment attraction agency extend common ground deliberately through strategies of adjustment such as employing staff who speak Mandarin to accommodate their Chinese counterparts. It implies the necessity of Chinese staff to promote smoother interactions in investment facilitation. The new dynamics of investment attraction involves seeing interactions with the Chinese investors as customer service operations. The interpreter, when used, appears to be an instrument in power dynamics, where distance or proximity to either side could make a difference in the outcome of negotiations. While Finns express their desire to work with interpreters who are familiar enough with Finland, some Chinese participants have expressed the concern that this may come at the expense of further distance from the Chinese side and weaken negotiation prospects.

Whether communication is direct or mediated, misunderstandings tend to arise when using a non-native language. When an utterance is not understood, it may have to do with the fact that English is not the native language for either of the parties to negotiations. Contextual information supporting the utterance may be lacking, or different meanings may attach to it in varied cultural contexts. Meaning may be lost in interpretation or misunderstood due to imprecise wording. However, having personal flexibility, supporting a common level of understanding, and being familiar with the other side's perspectives were seen as helpful for clarifying meanings during negotiations. Statements by interview

subjects about understanding each other primarily reflected this effort to ensure common ground.

To conclude, while Finnish representatives mostly understood language choices in terms of their search for common ground, always using English directly and even hiring Chinese staff to provide language assistance, Chinese representatives often stuck to the use of Mandarin. The fact that Chinese may insist on speaking Mandarin even when they know English could be seen as exercising autonomy and power, and thus de-emphasizing the search for common ground. This suggests that Chinese representatives accommodate their autonomous 'face' in this way (Brown & Levinson, 1987), asserting their power position above the creation of common ground. At the same time, the 'face' of affiliation is also manifest in trying to overcome misunderstandings, a clear priority for both Finnish and Chinese representatives. Finding a balance between the needs of autonomy and affiliation in the area of language is not an easy task. This is also reflected in the role of the mediators or interpreters. Whose side are they on, and are they familiar enough with Finland/China? Finns want to have a person who is familiar with Finland, but it is also important for Chinese representatives to have sufficient integration with life in China. Too much affiliation in either direction can be considered problematic. This study suggests the care that must be taken when using linguistic and cultural mediators, being aware that getting closer to one side comes at the expense of appearing farther from the other. Adjustments in language strategies occur in hopes of reaping benefits from the common ground created, but in certain situations choices may be made to assert autonomy and power positions.

The paper explored language in the context of Finnish-Chinese investment attraction, where there is an emerging dynamics whereby Finns market investment opportunities to Chinese investors. This newly developing context for intercultural communication may bear similarities with what is happening in Chinese investment facilitation elsewhere in the world, especially outside of native English-speaking countries. While Positioning Theory considers the context and the narrative according to which one chooses either common ground or power to be external circumstances, Politeness Theory reveals more about the internal motivations and considerations of 'face' involved in these decisions. The narrative of 'rising China' will continue to offer a framework for power positioning regarding the choice of language. In addition, the traditional notion of 'face' may continue to render the use of the Chinese language necessary in certain interactions. Both of these aspects work in favour of Chinese perspectives and the use of Mandarin Chinese.

The paper on language aspect in negotiation, like the one on humour, examined a narrower theme emerging from the qualitative data. Without an analysis of language choices, however, the dissertation would be incomplete, since this is such an essential aspect of negotiations. It was possible to find elements of both power and common ground when considering language choices in Finnish-Chinese negotiation. This article reveals somewhat parallel dynamics to those examined concerning humour: while Finnish representatives chiefly di-

rected their efforts at finding common ground and made adjustments regarding language to suit that aim, Chinese representatives appeared to show a more autonomous stance and power position. To the overall development of connection between power and common ground, this article contributed a consideration of both external and internal factors that impact the approach selected.

4 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS: INTERTWINING OF POWER POSITIONING AND SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IN CHINESE-FINNISH NEGOTIATION

This section will further elaborate on the *red thread* running through the research articles comprising this dissertation. While this study was initially motivated by a general interest in Finnish–Chinese intercultural negotiation, early in the data analysis phenomena related to power, positioning, and accommodation captured my attention and became the focus of the study. Another major theme was how common ground was sought and formed between the two sides. At the stage when article III on guest-host positioning was underway, I could see ways in which the search for common ground and power positioning were inter-related. These aspects were found to be connected and present simultaneously rather than remaining separate; they manifested in each of the sub-topics considered in the research articles. While the summary of the articles has already provided a glimpse into the development of this insight, this section will analyze it more deeply and draw the findings of all of these articles together. An overall summary of the results will be offered, seeking to analyze the connections between articles in the dissertation and to delineate what each of them contributes to the understanding of the search for common ground and power positioning.

To provide a substantial summary of the overall results of the study, I began the analysis by looking at the key words, statements, and findings within each article and then searched for general principles and explanations at a higher level of abstraction. I then used these to categorize the main points of each article and to come up with a new theoretical contribution regarding positioning in negotiation.

Turning to the contribution of each article, article I represented an example of a traditional approach to cultural differences and adjustment. The picture was, however, made more complex by looking at the instances when the adjustment was refused or not deemed necessary. Article II produced more so-

phisticated results, as I found that the responses of the parties did not only reflect adjustment or non-adjustment but could also impose on the other side and use existing common ground. The third article pointed out even more nuances to the situation and scenarios according to which power positioning occurs. For instance, beyond the narrative of ‘the rise of China,’ there is also a narrative of China as a developing country, and that roles of guests and hosts and hosting traditions contribute to how powerful or powerless the actors may feel and how they behave. In addition, the article revealed another possible response in positioning and common ground – the ‘soft power’ involved in presenting one’s own expertise, culture, and traditions. Further, two more specific themes developed into articles – humour and language – turned out to be sites where power positioning and the search for common ground also occur. Here the main dynamic was that both sides made adjustments to some degree in search of common ground, but it appeared that Finnish representatives were making them more often, while the Chinese more often indicated their own autonomy and concerns for ‘face.’ From article IV on humour emerged the fifth response about power and common ground – the stance of autonomy. Meanwhile article V on aspects related to language allowed me to see that the factors affecting positioning can be divided into external and internal ones. An overview of the main contribution of each article is provided in Table 4.

TABLE 4 Main contribution of dissertation articles to understanding power and common ground

Article	Contribution to understanding common ground and power
I, on adjustment	Different areas of adjustment, means of adjustment, and situations when adjustment does not happen
II, on common ground	Other ways of approach regarding common ground and power positioning – pressure and the use of existing common ground
III, on guest – host positioning	Factors affecting how power positioning and the search for common ground unfolds – narratives, place, and hosting traditions; ‘soft power’ as a response regarding power and common ground
IV, on humour	Autonomy as a response during negotiation; the effect of ‘face’ considerations
V, on language	The distinction between external and internal factors that impact the positioning of the parties

While drawing together the findings of all of the articles, I was able to discern new categories that allowed for deeper and more comprehensible analysis. Five distinct responses emerged gradually as the articles developed, involving distinct stances towards power and common ground. It appeared fruitful to go through the articles one more time, to categorize the main points made and the instances discussed in relation to these five stances. Table 5 summarizes this further synthesis. Codes Fi and Ch were used to refer to whether Finnish or Chinese representatives are referred to in the example given, and added numbers I-V to indicate the article where the instance appears.

TABLE 5 Examples from the articles of stances towards power positioning and finding common ground

Approach	Examples from main points made in the articles
Adjustment (used in 16 instances by Finnish representatives and in 6 instances by their Chinese counterparts)	Working late and on weekends (FiI), flexibility for planning (FiI), tolerating last minute confirmations, changes to the agenda (FiI), not asking direct questions (FiI), reading non-verbal cues (FiI), arranging seating in hierarchical order (FiI), arranging persons in homogenous status groups (FiI), attuning body language by using fewer gestures (FiI), speaking less frequently when in a lower power position (FiI), accepting Finnish straightforwardness and honesty (ChI), matching their own areas of strength with Chinese requirements (FiII), acceptance of the need to invest time and effort in building relationships (FiII), offering Chinese food during visits to Finland (FiIII), revising assumptions about China when visiting for the first time (FiIII), willingness to learn from Finnish innovation, technology, and social practices (ChIII), learning about and adjusting to a Chinese sense of humour and sensitivity about 'face' (FiIV), forcing themselves to make jokes within business negotiations (ChIV), direct use of English and having employees who can speak Chinese (FiV), aiming to overcome misunderstandings (Fi&ChV)
Using existing common ground (5 instances by Finnish and Chinese representatives, together)	Discussions with Chinese venture capitalists – similar global business orientation, less hierarchical elements (Fi&ChI), common areas of interest (Fi&ChII), practical and pragmatic working cultures (Fi&ChII), laughing and joking a little as a way to relax and relieve stress (Fi&ChIV), English as <i>lingua franca</i> , joint direct use of English (with young Chinese, Chinese venture capitalists) (Fi&ChV)
Autonomy (2 instances by Finnish representatives, 4 instances by Chinese representatives)	refusing to work under Chinese time expectations, insisting on their own working culture (FiI), a lack of serious interest in co-operation (ChII), seeing the other country as an unequal partner, not worth co-operating with: 'small Finland' (ChIII), 'developing China' (FiIII), joking about others, reluctance to laugh at oneself (ChIV), using Mandarin for original speech, letting the interpreter interpret into English (ChV)
Soft power (4 instances by Finnish representatives, 4 instances by Chinese representatives)	honouring and presenting their own working culture, straightforwardness (FiI), presenting their own areas of expertise (FiII), overwhelming generosity (ChIII), presenting Chinese traditions and food (ChIII), meeting among friends (FiIII), humorous boasting (ChIV), jokes based on (positive) national stereotypes (Ch&FiIV)
Pressure/Hedging (7 instances by Finnish representatives, 1 instance by Chinese representatives)	imposing the confirmation of the visit schedule (FiI), asking questions to pressure Chinese representatives to be more direct (FiI), organizing more visits to China (FiII), having more Chinese institutions in Finland (FiII), moving more readily from the government to the business-to-business or professional level (FiII), insisting that Chinese should try Finnish food (FiIII), wanting to have an interpreter who is closer to their own cultural background (Fi&ChV)

For the purposes of interpreting the main trends regarding each style and nationality, the examples listed were also counted. Adjustment emerged as the leading strategy in the data set, employed by both Finnish and Chinese repre-

sentatives. While there were many more instances of adjustment by Finns, the use of existing common ground and 'soft power' appeared to be equal for sides. Hedging/pressure was more actively used by Finnish representatives, while autonomy responses, in turn, were more typical of Chinese representatives.

The data set is small, but these findings offer hints about the dynamics of stances regarding power positioning and finding common ground. The overall trend that can be inferred is that the Finnish side relies more on active strategies such as adjustment and hedging, while the Chinese side appears to be 'cooler' about co-operation overall, and more often retreats into the stance of autonomy. This confirms the observation made in the summary for article II that Finns appear to be more driven to have actual co-operation and results, while the Chinese partners seem to be in a position to explore and choose between various possible partners around the world.

When I analyzed these five styles of response further, it appeared fruitful to approach them along the continuum from strongest to weakest in terms of power positioning, as seen in Table 6. Pressure/hedging is the most direct use of power as it attempts to shift another actor's response according to one's own expectations. However, this approach will only be successful if accepted by the interlocutor. 'Soft power' is milder in nature, but also involves asserting a certain degree of confidence or even pride in one's own culture, traditions, or expertise. Autonomy, in turn, can be seen predominantly as a disinterested demonstration of power, which neither offers an adjustment nor affects the interlocutor. Meanwhile, common ground allows for the highest degree of equality for the sides involved. Finally, adjustment amounts to accepting a less powerful position for the sake of increasing common ground. This analysis is not limited to the positioning of one side, but also makes implicit reference to the positioning of others. Referring to Harré (1990), speakers assign parts and characters in the interactions, both to themselves and to other people. Considering the implications of each response for the formation of common ground, the degree of power involved does not automatically increase or decrease interest in coming to agreement; power can be deployed in both interested (engaged) and disinterested (autonomous) ways. Thus, there is no direct connection between how much power is asserted and how much common ground is gained. Diametrically opposite strategies – pressure and adjustment – can both be successful for building common ground under certain circumstances. The most crucial factors include an interested stance and the favourable response of the other actor to the strategy employed. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness strategies have certain limited parallels with the continuum of responses depicted in Table 6, which will be further elaborated in the section on theoretical implications. These findings are also meaningful in the contrast they offer with traditional intercultural theory. For instance, Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986, 1993; 2004; 2013) sees intercultural competence as a matter of increasing acceptance and adjustment to difference, but this study indicates that even though that model may suit the experience of individual expatriates acclimatizing to a culturally different environment, this trajectory

does not necessarily account for business people working in the kinds of contexts discussed here. An additional exploration of this argument as well as parallels with the Ping Pong model proposed by Fang (1999), are included in the practical contribution section of the discussion.

As I analysed the distinct features of each approach to power and common ground and compared them, parallels to the Chinese five elements theory (*Wu Xing*) emerged: each approach was equivalent to one of the elements within the theory. Thus, Table 6 also includes the corresponding five elements and their usual characterization (based on Wu, 2006), as well as illustrative examples from the study. In response to dissatisfaction with so-called ‘Western-centric’ communication theories based on dichotomies and resulting calls for culture-specific, or emic approaches (Wang, 2011), an original theory is presented in this dissertation, synthesizing disparate concepts and theories used in this study and merging them into a cycle of five elements.

TABLE 6 Continuum of responses regarding power positioning and finding common ground

Approach	Pressure /hedging	‘Soft power’	Autonomy	Use of existing common ground	Adjustment
Own positioning	More powerful	Own power expressed in traditions and expertise	More powerful	Equal	Less powerful
Positioning of the other	Less powerful	Less powerful or equal	Less powerful or equal	Equal	More powerful
Search for common ground	Interested/ favourable if accepted	Interested/ favourable if accepted	Disinterested / unfavourable	Interested/ favourable	Interested/ favourable
Example from study	Trying to impose on another to be more direct (Fil)	Overwhelming generosity when hosting (ChIII)	Lack of serious interest in co-operation (ChII)	Pragmatism typical of both working cultures (Fi&ChII)	Adjustment to building of relationships in China (FiII)
Phase of Wu Xing theory and its characterization	Fire - red, expansive, speech, summer, brimming, swelling, energy, blooming, hot, triangle, joy, manners backward step	Wood - green, generative, sight, spring, vitality, sprouting, windy, rectangle, patience, benevolence, right step	Water - dark blue, conserving, hearing, winter, retreat, stillness, storage, dormant, cold, wavy, courage, wisdom, forward step	Metal - white, contracting, smell, autumn, harvesting, collecting, withering, dry, round, calmness, righteousness, left step	Earth - yellow, stabilizing, taste, late summer, transition, ripening, damp, square, empathy, credit, central position, balance

Just as Fang (2012b) used a *Yin Yang* model to illustrate the unity of opposites in culture, I employed the Chinese Wu Xing theory of five elements to understand and explain these five stances towards power and common ground. The Wu Xing model has been previously used, for instance by Kommonen (2008), to explore Chinese colour culture in business contexts.

The Chinese Wu Xing (五行; pinyin: *Wǔ Xíng*), also known as the Five Elements, Five Phases or the Five Agents, is an abbreviated form of the phrase ‘the five types of *chi* (energy) dominating at different times’ (Zai, 2015). Likewise, different approaches to power and common ground each dominate at different times and in different contexts. The five-fold conceptual scheme of Wu Xing has traditionally been used in many Chinese strands of thought to explain a broad range of phenomena, including cosmic cycles, internal organs, political regimes, and medical drugs.

I will further explain how the qualities of each approach towards power positioning and finding common ground correspond to a particular element of Wu Xing theory, exploring some of the associated terms listed in Table 6. First, *fire* corresponds to pressure/hedging due to its active, expansive nature. This element is associated with brimming, swelling energy, blooming and heat, and an actor engaged in pressure or hedging is generally passionate about cooperation and actively involved in trying to make it happen. The element concerns speech, and likewise pressure/hedging often involves an attempt to impact the interlocutor through persuasive words. However, just as fire can bring warmth, but sometimes burns, this strategy can backfire if the other side does not accept it. The related terms edgy triangle, backward step, and manners point out the need to be careful when employing this approach. Exerting pressure may not work at times, because speech acts such as requests and orders may be interpersonally sensitive. Negative ‘face’ of autonomy includes person’s wish to be unimpeded by others, act freely and not to be imposed upon (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and there will be a further reference to this dynamic in upcoming exploration of overcoming cycle of elements.

Next, ‘soft power’ corresponds to the element of wood, which is associated with spring, vitality, sprouting, and being generative. Likewise, actors presenting their culture, traditions, and expertise are being active in fostering cooperation, but are doing so in a more gentle way than in pressuring/hedging. Displaying one’s own culture and traditions for another to behold, concerns the sense of sight. The associated terms of patience and benevolence suggest that one needs to wait for another to respond.

Meanwhile, the autonomy response resonates with the element of water, which is associated with conserving, winter, retreat, stillness, storage, and being dormant and cold. Autonomy is the only strategy that is inactive and generally unfavourable for building common ground, so just as under cold conditions, vegetation cannot grow, if one side insists on a stance of autonomy, it is difficult to proceed with negotiations. The associated term of hearing suggests that the actor is only listening to something, without much response and engagement.

Also, the use of existing common ground is best likened to the element of metal due to its solidity. Possessing common ground appears to be a stable basis for co-operation. The contracting nature of this element can be interpreted as an ability to draw negotiating sides together. Such related terms as autumn, harvesting, and collecting suggest reaping fruits from collaboration. However, other terms such as calmness, withering, and dryness, that also characterize the element, suggest a lack of dynamism, which could signify that the use of existing common ground by itself may not be enough in the long term. Using this approach alone could indicate stagnation, so more active elements are also needed.

Finally, adjustment corresponds best to the element of earth, as it relates to transition, empathy, and credit. In order to adjust, one needs to change, put oneself into another's shoes, and give credit and respect to the culture of one's interlocutors. Furthermore, the earth is also associated with stabilizing features, central position, and balance, which suggests that adjustment is very important for establishing solid co-operation. Adjectives such as ripening, late summer, and dampness suggest an association with creating fruitful conditions for vegetation, or for collaboration.

Perhaps even more important than the character of each approach regarding power and common ground, is their dynamic and interchangeable quality. It is crucial to note that the translation of Wu Xing as five elements has come from false analogy with the Western system of the four elements that originated in classical Greek philosophy. In the Western system, elements are primarily related to substances or natural qualities, but the Chinese *xíng* are primarily concerned with process and change, and are more like 'phases' or 'agents' than static elements (Sivin, 1995).

Phases are Wood (木 *mù*), Fire (火 *huǒ*), Earth (土 *tǔ*), Metal (金 *jīn*), and Water (水 *shuǐ*), as presented in their 'mutual generation' order. The order of their 'mutual overcoming' proceeds in the opposite direction – Wood, Earth, Water, Fire, and Metal (Deng *et. al.*, 2000). The visual representation of five elements as applied to power and common ground, along with their generational and overcoming cycles, is shown in Figure 1.

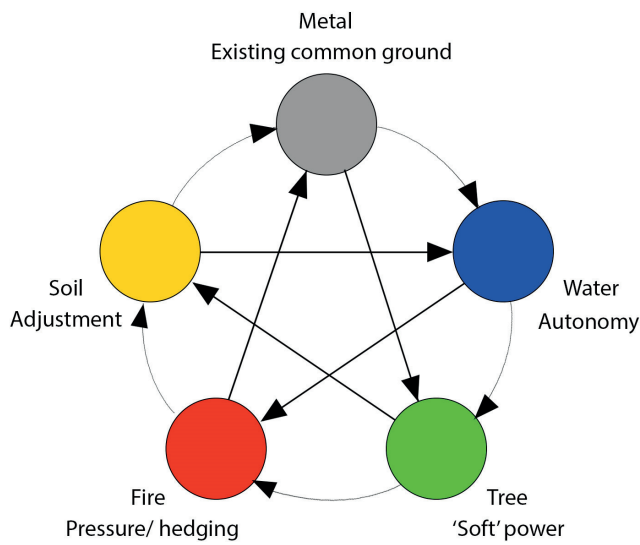


FIGURE 1 Generating and overcoming cycles of five phases of Wu Xing and approaches to power and common ground

Thus, traditionally, the system of five phases is predominantly used to describe interactions and relationships among phenomena. According to Sopper (1967), the generative circle illustrates the interaction between elements that react positively and should thus be used together. The generating is also called the 'begetting', 'engendering', and 'mothering' cycle. For instance, the element of Water compliments Metal and Wood; therefore, a painter would mix blue and green or blue and white colours together. To demonstrate conceptually whether this makes sense regarding the five approaches towards power and common ground, I have sought to describe possible changes from one phase to another using examples from this study. As before, codes refer to Finnish or Chinese representatives and number of the article where the instance appears. Please see Table 7 for the phases of the generating cycle as applied to power positioning and seeking common ground.

TABLE 7 Phases of the Wu Xing cycle of generation as applied to power and common ground, with examples

Phase of cycle	Application regarding approach to power and common ground
Wood feeds Fire = 'soft power' feeds pressure/hedging	'Soft power' involves coming forward with one's own qualities; further, in pressuring/hedging these strengths may be used to let one's own interests come through. <u>Example</u> - firstly presenting their own areas of strength and then trying to impose on the Chinese to be more direct about their possible interest in them (FiI)
Fire creates Earth (ash) = pressure/hedging feeds adjustment	This process could be seen in two ways. On one hand, if one applies some pressure, it is aimed at making another side adjust. If the interlocutor accepts the pressure and adjusts, then the strategy has succeeded. On the other hand, however, this could be seen in a different way - if the interlocutor does not accept and respond to pressure/hedging, then one may be forced to adjust instead. <u>Example</u> - Finns pressure Chinese representatives to confirm the visit schedule promptly. If the Chinese respond and confirm, they have adjusted. However, if Chinese representatives refuse to confirm ahead of time, then it is the Finns themselves who need to adjust and become more flexible (FiI)
Earth bears Metal = adjustment generates common ground	If one side is adjusting, new common ground will be created and any existing common ground extended, which is favourable for co-operation. <u>Example</u> - acceptance of the need to invest time in building relationships before assuming business tasks in China results in better success for Finnish representatives, such as forming partnerships (FiII)
Metal collects Water = existing common ground collects autonomy	Finding existing common ground collects a stance of autonomy for one or both sides. <u>Example</u> - The Chinese and the Finns both see themselves as pragmatic people, so the practicality and pragmatism of working cultures "click." Thus, the initial autonomy stance of disinterest changes into common ground (Fi&ChII)
Water nourishes Wood = autonomy nourishes 'soft power'	It can happen that one side is not yet interested in real co-operation, but still wants to show its own good qualities, culture, and traditions. <u>Example</u> - while laughing off the small population of Finland, Chinese representatives then brag about the size of their organizations and the size of China (ChIV)

These examples demonstrate that approaches to power and common ground can change according to the order depicted in the generating cycle of Wu Xing. The overcoming cycle, meanwhile, envisions negative interactions between elements that should not be put together. For example, Fire will not interact positively with Water, thus a painter would not choose to mix red and blue. The overcoming cycle is also called the 'controlling', 'restraining', or 'fathering' cycle. Table 8 describes the phases of overcoming cycle as they apply to stances towards power and common ground, along with examples from the study.

TABLE 8 Phases of Wu Xing overcoming cycle as applied to power and common ground, with examples

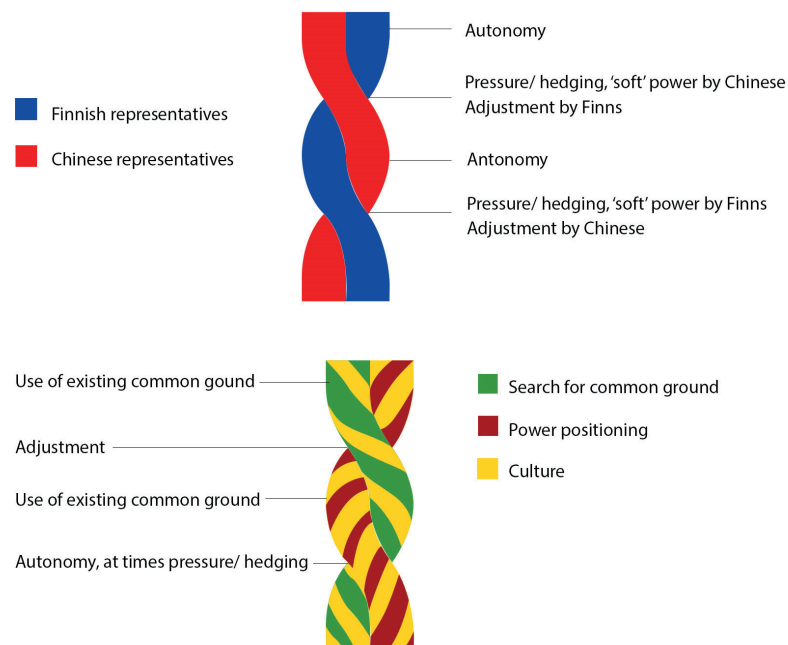
Phase of cycle	Application regarding approach of power and common ground
Wood parts Earth (trees prevent erosion)= 'soft power' overcomes adjustment	'Soft power' in general does not go together with adjustment, because the former deals with insisting on one's own cultural values and the latter focuses on changing them. <u>Example</u> - asserting one's own qualities such as honesty and straightforwardness over the need to adjust to indirectness by the Chinese (FiI)
Earth dams (or muddles or absorbs) Water = adjustment overcomes autonomy	Adjustment and autonomy are opposites and cannot be employed at the same time by the same actor. But, it is possible to envision that in case one side is willing to adjust, the autonomy stance of the other side can be overcome. <u>Example</u> - Finns demonstrate expertise areas and adjust them to the needs of the Chinese, and as they start to see value, their initial autonomy stance and disinterest is overcome (FiII)
Water extinguishes Fire= autonomy overcomes pressure /hedging	If one side insists on being autonomous and disinterested in co-operation, then the efforts at pressure/hedging will not succeed. <u>Example</u> - if the Chinese are only planning a visit as a leisure trip, they have a short formal meeting at a local government in Finland, because they are not interested in real co-operation. Within such arrangement, very likely no matter how hard the Finnish side tries, it will not be possible to come up with real results during the meeting (ChII)
Fire melts Metal = pressure/ hedging overcomes common ground	If one is pressurizing /hedging, at times it may destroy the chance of using common ground, as by definition hedging is trying to push one's own interests through. <u>Example</u> - wanting to have an interpreter who is more familiar with the Finnish system comes at the expense of the person being further away from the Chinese delegates, as is the case with Finnish-born Chinese (Fi&ChV)
Metal chops Wood= common ground overcomes soft power	When common ground is found, the use of 'soft power' strategy may cease and become unnecessary. <u>Example</u> - Finns find it easy to work with Chinese venture capitalists, as there is similar global-minded business thinking, less hierarchical elements, thus there are less cultural factors to deal with (Fi&ChI)

It is also possible to see how the overcoming cycle of the Wu Xing works when applied to stances towards power and common ground, further demonstrating the relevance of this new theoretical contribution.

To sum up, in applying the generating and overcoming cycles of phases to the approaches towards power and common ground, I have demonstrated how one approach can change into another. In particular, I have done so by explaining in general terms how the change could occur and then illustrating the transitions using the study data. Building on the dynamic change of phases in the exploration of cycles, I further argue that it is natural in negotiations for pressure/hedging, soft power, autonomy, use of common ground, and adjustment to succeed one another at different times.

I will offer another illustration based on an original model of a rope, in Figure 2. Similar to the act of tying a rope or braid, co-operating parties in negotiation can be seen as starting off as separate strands. Autonomy, separation, and lack of interest, while they appear unfavourable for the search for common ground, are a natural stage of the process. As the rope is tied together, at certain points one strand needs to be placed over another. Likewise, the decision to adjust, implying a lower power position, or accepting when another party positions you in this way, is inherent to the process and required to create the common ground that will tie the parties together. Or, from another perspective, one partner may initiate a powerful and interested state by pressure/hedging while the other accepts it in turn. I would suggest that 'soft power' could work in a somewhat similar way: it is also an active strategy for both power and common ground, to which interlocutor can respond favourably by adjusting. At the next moment, parties may become separate and autonomous again, and eventually take turns in precedence in terms of power.

FIGURE 2 Rope model of interchange of stances towards power positioning and finding common ground



The styles become intertwined, and as long as there are intersection points, the rope will stick together. Taking turns, intersecting, and separation will not happen with the same regularity in real life as we see it in a rope, and the possibility also exists that the parties could part ways. Referring to Wang (2007), quite

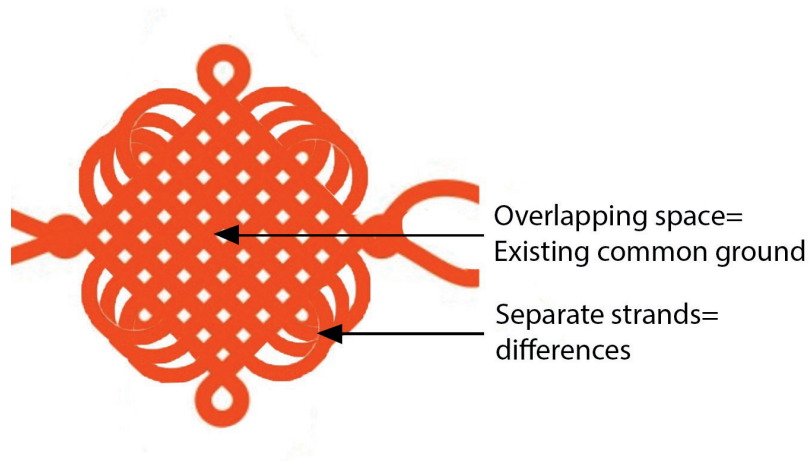
often Finnish-Chinese partnerships fail before their declared goals are achieved, because they are motivated by one-sided strategies which may not match the other side's requirements. If there is mismatch between power positioning and the search for common ground, both parties refuse to adjust and there is insufficient common ground, there will be no result from the negotiation. Also, the rope will not stick together well if one side is constantly pre-eminent. Any woven structure is stronger when positions change and turns are taken. According to Spitzberg (1997), the best results of negotiations arise when parties begin in a fairly competitive mode, but conclude with co-operative orientations. Encounters tend to work more smoothly when dominant moves receive passive responses, and vice versa. Most of the time, interaction will be regarded as competent when power balance is complementary, not reciprocal (Spitzberg, 1997).

In a somewhat similar fashion, the parallel of the rope can also be used to characterize the intertwining of power and common ground (Figure 2, the lower image). When the existing common ground is employed, power and common ground are separate strands that do not intersect; this is favourable situation and neutral in terms of power. However, in the case of adjustment, common ground comes over the power: one part accepts a lower power position for the sake of building common ground. When taking the stance of autonomy, by contrast, power takes pre-eminence over common ground. The same thing can happen when using pressure and hedging: if another side is not responding well, power will be asserted at the cost of losing common ground.

Since this is a study of how people from different cultures negotiate, including the notion of culture within this model was also important. I have shown culture to be intertwined with both the strand of power and the strand of common ground, since I observe cultural elements in both power positioning and search for common ground. As an example of power, 'face' considerations specific to Chinese culture motivate the choice of an autonomy stance, as discussed in article IV on humour. For the common ground emphasis, one example is Finnish adjustment to Chinese hierarchy by using fewer gestures and speaking less when in a lower power position, as discussed in article I on adjustment.

Turning to the use of common ground, there is an existing theoretical model based on visualization of Chinese knot by Kuo and Chew (2011), for which see Figure 3. These authors have suggested that just as in a Chinese knot, there are both overlapping spaces and separate strands: cultures share commonalities and differences. This illustration can be applied not only to culture, but also to the existing common ground in negotiations in general. The overlapping space, if it is sufficient, can in fact hold the entire structure together. If there is sufficient existing common ground and not much need to adjust, the power positioning of both sides can remain equal. From this study, perhaps the strongest example was the use of existing common ground with venture capitalists, when it seems that expectations were similar and fewer cultural factors would arise. Also, a strong point was made about the practicality and pragmatism typical of both Finnish and Chinese working cultures.

FIGURE 3 Use of existing common ground as illustrated by Chinese knot (Kuo & Chew, 2011)



After exploring the stances towards power and common ground and their dynamic nature in detail, some attention needs to be devoted also to the factors that influence positioning. Article III on guest–host positioning supplied the most insight into such factors. In turn, article V on language choices showed that positioning can be affected by both external and internal factors. I have therefore summarized all main factors influencing positioning discussed in the articles in Table 9, dividing them into ones that are more external in nature and those with an internal character.

Although the list cannot be considered exhaustive, it contains some of the main factors determining why a certain stance towards power and common ground was chosen in a particular situation. As in the previous tables, codes are used to designate the nationality the point concerns and the number of article where it is made. For instance, one of the most important factors is the organizational position of actors and the roles they have in the situation, along with what that may imply about their power positioning. From the data of study, it was possible to see following role pairs: seller–buyer, promoter–investor, service provider–customer, consultant–trainee, and guest–host. Most of these imply unequal power positions in favour of the Chinese representatives. Roles (a relatively static notion) or positions (a more flexible term) provide a fundamental reference system for unfolding power relationships and the search for common ground. However, multiple roles or positions can coexist or succeed each other at different times even within the course of one visit, affecting power positioning and the search for common ground. Among the most important internal factors, ‘face’ considerations deserve mention, as well as pre-existing discourses or narratives about the partner country.

TABLE 9 Lists of main factors affecting positioning regarding power and common ground

External factors	Internal factors
Place (Finland or China) – being on home ground one feels more powerful, and vice versa, (FiIII, ChIII, ChIV)	‘Face’ considerations (ChI, ChIV, ChV)
Position in the situation/organizational positioning: seller-buyer, promoter/investor, service person/customer (FiI, ChI, FiI, ChII, FiIII, ChIII), developed (consultant) – developing (trainee)(FiIII, ChIII), friends (equal)(FiIII), guest-host (FiIII, ChIII)	Pre-existing discourses/narratives, such as ‘China is still a developing country’ (FiIII), ‘Finland is small and not worth co-operating with’ (ChIII), ‘the rise of China’ (FiI), ‘Finland as a developed country’ (ChII)
Socioeconomic developments – the need to be economically successful (FiI), or a booming economy and ability to choose between many partners (ChII)	Cost-benefit considerations (FiI, ChII)
Professional background, such as government official or venture capitalist (ChI, ChV)	Desire to be true to and to present one’s own culture and traditional cultural values in communication and working style (FiI, FiIII, ChIII, FiV, ChV)
Vague or restrictive government regulations (FiII, ChII)	Visiting impressions in the other country (FiIII, ChIII)
Age (ChI, ChV)	Individual personality and background (FiI, FiIII, ChIII, ChV)

Although including factors as ‘internal’ or ‘external’ can be challenged in some instances, I found it useful to show that the factors influencing positioning can come in a ‘harder’ form in relation to external conditions, such as government regulations, place, and socioeconomic conditions and also in the ‘softer’ form of perceptions, experiences, cultural considerations, and so on.

In conclusion, by not just simply summing up the results of the articles but rather seeking a deeper analysis of their overall results I uncovered a way to interpret how the articles fit together and to contribute to a more complex understanding regarding power positions and the search for common ground. In particular, five approaches emerged – pressure/hedging, ‘soft power’, autonomy, use of existing common ground, and adjustment. Their distinct character and dynamic nature was explored, drawing parallels with the Chinese theory of five elements (Wu Xing). The integral process of change relating to different approaches and the intertwining of power, common ground, and culture were further illustrated using the model of a rope. A variety of external and internal factors influencing these stances were traced from the articles, further revealing the complex ways power positioning relates to the search for common ground.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Aims revisited and key findings

This study started off from a general interest in Finnish-Chinese intercultural negotiation in recognition of the new dynamic of Chinese investment attraction to Finland. The aim was formulated quite broadly, to get to know more about intercultural communication in this setting.

After data analysis and the completion of several research articles, the updated overarching aim of the study became the investigation of emerging power relations between Finns marketing investment targets and products and Chinese as investors, buyers, and partners. Component research questions were formulated, starting from the most general questions to more specific aspects, as follows: What insights can be drawn from this context about intercultural communication and the meanings and interpretations attributed by its participants? What new theoretical insights can be acquired into the interplay between power positioning and finding common ground in negotiation? What role does the 'rise of China' play in the intercultural negotiation and search for common ground between Finnish and Chinese representatives? What does the everyday reality of those doing the job of investment, co-operation, and trade facilitation between China and Finland look like?

By taking an inductive approach to studying communication, this study has provided an understanding of a still-developing context for intercultural communication. The whole world is now approaching China for investment and market access in parallel ways, and power relations are therefore shifting in favour of Chinese interests and perspectives; the study aimed to offer insights that can be applicable on a wider scale and in various settings. Since the search for common ground is an essential aspect of negotiations in general, this became one of the main themes of this dissertation, along with power positioning. This study addressed the phenomena of power positioning and the search for common ground with reference to a number of topics identified within the data. In retrospect, it is evident that each of these aspects was important and useful to understand the overall picture and the various ways the search for common ground intersects with power positioning. It appears that some of the study's

main conclusions derive reinforcement from the overall summary of articles, such as the emerging trend by which Chinese representatives are placed in a more powerful position.

One of the key findings of this dissertation was that power positioning and common ground aspects are inherently connected rather than being separate. In particular, five styles of response regarding power and common ground emerged; placed in a continuum from strongest to weakest in using power, these were: pressure/hedging, 'soft power', autonomy, the use of existing common ground, and adjustment. The distinct character and shifting nature of each of these was explored, and parallels drawn to the Chinese theory of five elements (Wu Xing). Adjustment was the main strategy deployed by the Finnish side, and involved adjustments to be made in the domains of culture, language-, and even humour. The integral process of change regarding different styles and intertwining of power, common ground, and culture was further illustrated with a model of a rope, demonstrating that taking turns in terms of power, autonomy and using common ground are inherent to the process of negotiation. A variety of both external and internal factors influencing positioning were identified through the analysis in the articles, further revealing the dynamic inter-relationship between power positioning and seeking common ground.

These results confirm that positioning occurs along many dimensions, depending on the context, and demonstrates the flexible positions of those participating in negotiations. While there clearly was a power dynamic favouring Chinese representatives, their Finnish counterparts also worked to de-concentrate it, or to shift the balance of power in favour of Finnish participants. The main trends in this data suggest that Finnish representatives predominantly use a combination of active strategies such as, adjustment and pressure/hedging, in their efforts to create common ground, while Chinese representatives often resorted to the stance of autonomy. This suggests that the Finnish side was more motivated to make things happen, overall, while the Chinese partners could perhaps afford just to explore options as they were in a position to pick and choose partners from around the world.

While the phrase 'the rise of China' implies an unequal power relationship, as if China previously has been something 'less' than the West, this study to some extent demonstrates a reversal of the traditional mindset of so-called Western colonial ideology when seeking to do business with China. As this power relationship has been changing rapidly, negotiations between Finnish and Chinese partners have offered fruitful ground to analyze the repercussions of 'the rise of China' and how it may affect the search for common ground.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This study presents a new theoretical contribution towards an understanding of the practices of power positioning and seeking common ground in intercultural negotiation. It proceeded from concepts of positioning and of narratives, which have not been common in the field of intercultural communication so far. The main theoretical contribution of this dissertation is a model regarding various stances towards power and common ground, along with the factors that influence these choices. Drawing on and synthesizing concepts from Positioning Theory, Politeness Theory, the concept of common ground, and borrowing the terms 'soft power' and 'hedging' from international relations theory, a new and more comprehensive understanding of negotiations is offered in a five-fold schema. I discovered this theoretical contribution by using an inductive approach to data. I also found that deploying power is not always contrary to the establishment of common ground. Power can be expressed in a way that is disinterested in common ground – as autonomy – or in a way that shows interest, such as hedging/pressure.

Using the cultural resources of traditional Chinese thought, the distinct attributes and dynamic nature of these five approaches to power and common ground have been demonstrated. It is desirable to integrate elements of Chinese philosophy in theory building, especially when addressing contexts that involve Chinese representatives (Fang, 2012b; Wang, 2011). Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, 1997), which was also utilized in this study, also supports the idea of using the cultural resources of Chinese philosophy to describe speech codes in particular contexts. The findings of this study notably support the second proposition of that theory, which states that multiple speech codes coexist and mix together in concrete situations. The sixth proposition also receives additional support from the results of this study. It states that people experience pressure to conform to accepted speech codes within a society, which explains why adjustment efforts are observed to be the main strategy in this negotiation process (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005).

The main theory used in this dissertation was the Positioning Theory outlined by Harré (1991), which centres on the view that the local distribution of rights and duties motivates different choices of actions and influences the way interactions unfold. While supporting some of the theory's claims, this study also provides important supplements to it. For instance, the 'local' is an important notion for power positioning, as local representatives tended to feel more powerful in negotiations. The Finnish representatives appeared to experience comparatively more power when they hosted negotiations in Finland than as visitors in China. Likewise, Chinese representatives felt more powerful in China than when they visited Finland. Thus, the location of the visit tends to shift the power dynamics in favour of the host.

Another important claim of the Positioning Theory is that positioning activity may involve shifts in power, granting or blocking of access, and offering

choices among different lines of action (Davies & Harré, 1990). This study affirmed that, indeed, distinct discourses can coexist, compete, and create multiple versions of reality. Perhaps the best example was the coexisting discourses of 'rising China' vs. 'small Finland' and 'developed Finland' vs. 'developing China.' Differing lines of action may also be chosen depending on the specific context. While adjustment emerged as the main response of the Finnish representatives, overall, they did not adjust when it was not relevant to do so (e.g., with the Chinese venture capitalists), or if the Chinese could accept a different approach (e.g., maintaining Finnish straightforwardness). While, overall, the evidence confirms the powerful position of Chinese representatives, this it could also be challenged in certain contexts and at certain times.

Positioning Theory also asserts the importance of narratives in relation to positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990). The 'rise of China' discourse was identified as the main positioning narrative for the Finnish representatives. It became part of a reference frame, particularly for Finns working to encourage Chinese investment, which they took account of as they adjusted to Chinese working and communication styles, culture, language choices, sense of humour, etc. When the Finnish side made adjustments for the sake of building common ground, it could be seen as a gesture that the new power relations are being asserted and accepted. However, at other times power relations can come into conflict with building common ground if one side asserts a discourse of power, but the other side does not want to adjust and wants to maintain its own dominance. This may have to do with the transaction cost and what is more valuable in a particular situation – power position or potential gain?

Power positioning also depends on the roles of the representatives and purpose of the delegation's visit. If Chinese representatives come to Finland as potential investors, the 'rise of China' discourse is very present, as it is when Finns go to China to sell their products and promote their companies to China's rapidly growing markets. However, if a Chinese delegation comes with the goal of learning from Finnish partners, and the Chinese are interested in technology transfer, the dominant discourse was that of Finland as developed and China as a developing country.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies have certain limited parallels with the continuum of responses regarding power and common ground drawn from this study. For instance, one positive politeness strategy they observe is presupposing or asserting common ground. Adjustment can also relate to positive politeness strategies: for instance, attending to hearer's interests, wants, needs, or goods and avoiding disagreement. 'Soft power' could relate in part to such positive politeness strategies as giving reasons (showing one's own expertise) and giving gifts (tokens of pride in one's own culture). Pressure/hedging corresponds to the negative politeness strategies, for instance, being direct or conventionally direct, questioning, and hedging. While in terms of politeness, such approaches may be seen as negative, for the purposes of creating common ground they may still work if accepted. In the framework of politeness strategies, autonomy is understood more as respecting another's space,

minimizing impositions on the hearer, but in the context of my study autonomy emerged more as a requirement for one's own space and a somewhat disengaged attitude towards interaction. However, one of the negative politeness strategies – being pessimistic – nevertheless appears characteristic of this style. In conclusion, while there are certain limited parallels, it appears that Politeness Theory is more other-oriented, while the five-fold model of responses appears to be somewhat more centred on a group's own interests. It can be claimed that this difference is characteristic of a comparatively fragmented investment attraction context and differs from more traditional, long-term business relationships.

The relevance of 'face' considerations was affirmed from the data of this study, in particular for Chinese representatives; this manifested in taking an autonomous stance to save 'face' and assert one's power position. Concerning the related concept of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2005), this study echoes the idea that there are more subtle nuances than those represented by a two-fold scheme of autonomy or affiliation. Additionally, cost-benefit considerations were further affirmed as factors affecting power positioning.

To sum up, the new theoretical contribution of the study emerged from the synthesis of several existing theories and concepts and was arrived at by approaching study data in an inductive way. Based on this study, five distinct approaches to power and common ground could be identified, and their intertwining was demonstrated by the rope model. Several claims of the Positioning Theory were verified and further elaborated, contributing to the understanding of power and common ground in negotiations. The overall represented the common denominator of Positioning Theory, Speech Codes Theory, and Politeness Theory: the dynamic nature of shifting stances towards power positioning and finding common ground depended on various external and internal conditions.

5.3 Practical implications

The practical contribution of the study is to illustrate the power dynamics between representatives of an emerging large country and a smaller developed country, which certainly has implications for the broader context of co-operation between developed economies seeking economic revitalization and emerging economies on the rise.

The research project offers a contribution to the field of intercultural communication as an empirical study focused on aspects of power in intercultural communication. The novelty and usefulness of these findings relate to how the aspect of power positioning acts in relation to the search for common ground. The findings of the study suggest that, first, partners will tend to be motivated to adjust if there is a narrative of the other country being in a (growing) position of power and where there is a potential for economic gain. Adjustments can be derived from learning experiences in situational contexts as well as preconcep-

tions and stereotypes about the other. However, the accommodation may only last up to a certain point. When it becomes 'too much' or adjustment is a lesser priority, the partners' own power and communication style may be asserted. Second, the study demonstrates that there are at least five approaches towards power and common ground in this context, identified as pressure/hedging, autonomy, 'soft power,' use of existing common ground, and adjustment. While the use of existing common ground and adjustment promote joint understanding directly, pressure and 'soft power' may also contribute to it if accepted and accommodated by the other party. The stance of autonomy, on the other hand, represents in this context an un-cooperative mode in which power is demonstrated at the expense of the search for common ground. In real life, all of these strategies may be used depending on context and time and are intermingled rather than separate. Diametrically opposite strategies may be employed at different times regarding the same issues. Still, the examples of Finnish adjustment to the Chinese were more prevalent in the data set when compared to other strategies.

The theoretical model of approaches regarding common ground and power can be applied intentionally in practice where there is interest in maximizing the common ground established. From the results of this study, it can be argued that the most effective way to increase common ground involves a combination of several of these approaches – using the existing common ground, exerting pressure on the other side to accept your priorities to some extent, adapting part of the other side's approach as your own, and making interlocutors interested by showing the 'soft power' arising from one's own expertise and culture. Knowing this, one can consciously plan how to use each of these options wisely to maximize the chances of success. Acceptance of autonomy and disinterest at certain stages can also have practical value when it is seen as an integral part of a dynamic and shifting process. When choosing the most favourable stance towards power positioning and finding common ground, one needs to take into consideration context and situation. For instance, Finnish representatives responded to indirectness by the Chinese by adjusting to them at times, while in other cases they would pressure them to be more direct.

The study also uncovered some factors impacting the power positioning and the search for common ground, which explain why certain strategies may be chosen. It was possible to divide these into external and internal factors. The most important external factors were socioeconomic situation, role or position in a particular situation, and place of meeting. Among the internal factors, 'face' considerations and preconceived discourses or stereotypes about the other country could be named as important.

Another important observation concerned the fluidity of stances regarding power positioning and the search for common ground. For instance, preconceived assumptions about power can shift even in the course of one visit, as in the example of Finns going to what they expect to be a backwards developing country (China) and then being overwhelmed by the urbanism and rapid development there. Or, a Chinese representative who comes to Finland for a vaca-

tion may become interested in technological co-operation after being presented with Finnish areas of expertise. Faced with evidence, one may adjust own position, from assuming exaggerated power or disinterest (an autonomy-based view) towards recognizing the power of the interlocutor and becoming motivated to find common ground.

While considering the practical application of these results, I would like to compare the findings from my inductive study to two other models that deal with the practice of adjustment in intercultural communication.

Looking at the Ping Pong model of negotiating with the Chinese (Fang, 1999), certain parallels can be drawn with my five-fold model of approaches towards finding common ground and power positioning. The *gentleman* role in the Ping Pong model involves moral cultivation, the importance of relationships, respect for hierarchy/‘face,’ and avoidance of conflict. Thus, this style relates more to positive politeness and resonates with the adjustment and ‘soft power’ responses of my five-fold model. The *strategist* approach, in turn, corresponds to hedging, as the aim in both cases is to gain material or psychological advantage over the interlocutor. The *bureaucrat* stance defined by Fang (1999) would relate more to the use of common ground or autonomy, as it appears to be a more neutral and pragmatic approach. In my study, autonomy was connected to an unstable legal network and a lack of clear government policy or strategy. Fang (1999) saw trust and political factors as the main conditions that will affect the response: when trust is high, Chinese negotiators will negotiate as gentlemen, but in low trust situations, they tend to negotiate as strategists. Meanwhile, when politics is heavily involved, they will negotiate more like bureaucrats. Indeed, it is possible that Chinese actors would not be the only ones to do so: this pattern may also apply to representatives of other nationalities. In the present study, I identified numerous internal and external factors that could have an impact, but did not link them necessarily to a particular choice. It might have been possible to establish some such connections as a further step in my analysis; at the same time, such an approach could prove too limiting and deterministic in relation to the overall picture of dynamism and change that arises from my theoretical contribution.

Some limited parallels could also be drawn between my model and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) developed by Bennett (1986, 1993; 2004; 2013), where increasing sensitivity to cultural difference is interpreted along a continuum from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. Autonomy could correspond somewhat with the stage of *denial* in this model, as both indicate disinterest and a somewhat dismissive attitude. The *Defense* stage, in turn, bears some similarities with hedging/pressure as it involves seeing one’s own way as superior and possibly enforcing it on another. *Minimization* is somewhat similar to a common ground approach as it focuses on similarities and that which is universal or transcends differences. Meanwhile, *acceptance* resonates with a ‘soft power’ approach, as it involves curiosity or respectfulness towards differences, though the DMIS interprets this as more other-oriented, while in my model, it mostly concerns self-presentation. *Adaptation* in DMIS is

quite similar to adjustment as, in both cases, behaviour is altered to fit a different context and empathy is required. Finally, *integration* involves an in-between state that helps to bridge perceived cultural differences and allows mediation; it may refer to the dynamic nature of my five-fold model of approaches to power and common ground and the observation that one approach can easily change into another.

On the other hand, key differences include the focus within DMIS on the scale of the individual, and its view of cultural sensitization as a linear process with stages that do not change easily, where the last stage represents intercultural competence and the process is not notably related to situations or variations of experience. While this model can be relevant for individual sojourners in a different culture, for instance expatriates (Selmer, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2014), it is not so appropriate in the dynamic context of investment attraction discussed in this dissertation. The findings of this study therefore show contrasting dynamics from those of traditional intercultural theory, which may be more suitable for understanding traditional, long-term business relationships. DMIS sees intercultural competence as a matter of increasing acceptance and adjustment to difference. In a rapid-paced investment attraction context, there are urgent pragmatic needs to be considered, and one tends to be more self-oriented than other-oriented in these interactions. Thus, depending on needs and interests, there will be dynamic shifts in approach and different stances may be used interchangeably, so no linear process will be evident. As an individual sojourner in a foreign country, one may follow a linear trajectory of adjustment, but in the comparatively fragmented context of investment attraction, any responses will be more limited in time and space. The actions of representatives are often motivated by pragmatic interests to a large extent, and therefore adjustments may last only up to a certain point. This idea is not totally new, however; for instance, Francis (1991) has suggested that moderate (rather than high degree) adaptation may be the best choice in business contexts.

To conclude, the five-fold model serves better to interpret the more dynamic situation of investment attraction, where place is no longer as fixed and there is intensive travel happening. Roles of those participating are also more dynamic than they have been in the past. Such a temporary and fluid environment may determine the need for more 'self-focus' and autonomy, along with the comparatively fragmentary nature of these encounters. The characteristics of investment attraction increasingly involve work with multiple partners in the short term around a variety of topics and possible targets of investment and cooperation. My five-fold case-based model is therefore suitable for explaining these new characteristics of investment attraction and incorporates recent changes in working styles.

Turning to the notion of power in this study, I concentrated on 'power as described' where people define their own actions in relation to power. This study's conclusions about power were mostly based on the participants' own interpretations. While the growing power of China is certainly measurable in economic terms, power is also something constructed on an ongoing basis in

contexts and relationships. While the 'rise of China' phenomenon persists, it is expected that there will be more initiatives and projects involving Chinese resources in Finland and throughout the world. The practical contribution of the study relates to the context of Finnish–Chinese co-operation, where there is an emerging dynamic of Finns as marketers of investment opportunities and Chinese as investors. This developing context for intercultural communication may bear similarities with what is happening in co-operation with China elsewhere in the world. Thus, research such as this provides valuable insights, becoming useful material to those who are working in similar contexts or as consultants to the parties involved. The study brings a needed update to the understanding of co-operation with China and intercultural negotiation in a rapidly changing context.

This study indicated that those working in co-operation with China did not see the rise of China as a source of fear, but rather focused on the opportunities related to potential co-operative relationships with China. Especially in the state agency, they saw their work as providing service to customers, which might involve tolerating a lack of confirmation and last-minute changes that would not be considered good business etiquette in other contexts. In some situations, in fact, they adopted an uncritical 'customer is always right' attitude. This study also suggests the need for careful use of linguistic and cultural mediators. One needs to be aware that when an interpreter or mediator develops closeness with one party, it may come at the expense of distance from another. Finding an ideal balance is not an easy task. The study also brings to awareness the areas that are problematic for the search for common ground, such as misunderstandings involved in using English as a *lingua franca*, different styles and sensitivities regarding humour, specific hosting traditions, and traditional ways of doing business, potentially different understandings about efficiency, and the possibility that government regulations may affect the progress of projects. The pragmatism and practicality identified as common ground between Finnish and Chinese working cultures was identified by the editor of *Journal of China and International Relations* as one of the most important practical contributions of the study that is worthy of further research.

Thus, while addressing the context of investment and cooperation facilitation with China in Finland and focusing on the intertwining of power positioning and the search for common ground in negotiations, the study brings relevant, practical contributions to those working in similar contexts around the world.

5.4 Limitations

This research project addresses the dynamic qualities of a situation, and therefore the issue of sample size and representativeness does not much affect the project's basic logic. In a qualitative framework, research based on interviews seeks to show the meanings and interpretations held by informants; therefore, a

small number of cases can facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents within naturalistic settings (Crouch, 2006). When employing an ethnographic perspective, any concern generalization is incidental and serves only the purpose of understanding the specific (Spradley, 1980a). Although the sample size of this study was comparatively small, the collected data turned out to be rich in meaning. I wanted to display these understandings in sufficient detail in each article and felt that the collected data provided enough material to do so. Even a few minutes of observation can provide a wealth of data and ascertain emic relevance (Hymes, 1974). Also, other authors in the field have published articles which do not necessarily use a wealth of empirical data: Spencer-Oatey (2003) based a paper on observations of two meetings, while Fang (2005-2006) refers to one interview in his article.

We don't have to measure our explications against uninterpreted data and radically thinned descriptions, but rather against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers. ²

The fact that this study is predominantly based on interviews can be seen as another limitation. People's answers in interviews may not have a stable relationship with how they would behave in naturally occurring situations (Silverman, 2006). However, their stories do provide insights about their momentary concerns and circumstances. A question arises regarding the status of interview data: are they true representations of features such as attitudes and behaviour or simply accounts whose construction is more important than their accuracy? The context of the interview, in this view, is not something given in advance, but rather, it is constructed during the course of the conversation (Briggs, 1986). Stereotyping of the interlocutor can also occur in participants' interpretations. The perceptions of interviewees may be subjective, and their expressions in themselves can be seen as part of a power positioning strategy. At the same time, however, interviews offer a unique window into reality and, in this case, onto a nuanced understanding about Finnish-Chinese negotiation. We may wonder whether the Finnish view of power is tied to their historical need to cooperate with and adjust to major powers such as Sweden and Russia. In fact, we could interpret some of the power dynamics as Finns having a small nation mentality in their encounters with China.

However, most of the main points I made in the articles were backed up by direct observation as well as interviews, providing additional support. As well, power was treated 'as described', constructed in interaction and interpreted by participants, so from this perspective, interview material was an appropriate means to investigate perceptions of power. Also, inspiration for new theoretical models does not necessarily need much data; at a higher level of abstraction even hypothetical data may be used. Regarding the five approaches towards power and common ground, I believe that the representativeness of these scenarios in real life is not the main concern, but rather the observation

² Geertz 1973, 13

that these stances exist and are referred to in both the answers of informants and often also in direct observation.

The fact that those interviewed included both national (state) and local (city or regional) representatives can be seen as both a limitation and strength of this research. Having all interviews with participants at the same level might allow stronger statements to be made about one kind of co-operation specifically. However, it also appeared to be strength of the study as it resulted in richer meanings and greater variety of observations. In addition, it appears that the interactions in question are deeply interconnected, so in fact it is not possible to draw a clear line between local and state levels, or even between public and business sectors, in these interactions. During the visits, these organizations often work together, assist each other, and are simultaneously present. Thus, by presenting these levels together, the study operates at a higher level of abstraction, since the general area of focus (Finnish-Chinese negotiation) includes similar phenomena no matter whether state or local government actors are involved.

The interpretation of Finnish-Chinese negotiations presented here is rather one-sided, since it is drawn mainly from the perspective of Finnish informants. It was difficult to get access to the Chinese visitors due to short visits and packed schedules. The question therefore arises whether the result might be different if Chinese representatives were represented equally as interview subjects? Would their perceptions match the other observations, with representatives seeing themselves in a growing position of power, or would they interpret the search for common ground and power positioning differently, perhaps along the lines of 'we are adjusting, Finns try to be powerful?' The fact that there were informants of Chinese nationality in the study, though representing the Finnish 'side', made it more plausible to infer the position of the Chinese delegations. The visitors shared some thoughts with them, which they further reported in the interviews. Participants of Chinese origin sometimes sided with what they represented as the feelings and views of the Chinese visitors or hosts. Incorporating these observations helped balance the one-sidedness of the study and bring in perspectives of the Chinese representatives, as well. However, further research on the interpretations held by Chinese representatives is certainly necessary.

The main purpose of collecting study data was not to claim representativeness, or to investigate the relative frequency of every stance towards power and common ground, nor to compare the experience of Finnish and Chinese representatives. Instead, it has been an inductive study aimed at identifying topical areas and concerns in communication and, later, gaining additional insight into the modes in which power and common ground are intertwined. For this purpose, and despite their limitations, the study data have served well.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

There are several directions in which further research is recommended. First of all, as mentioned in the previous section, the perceptions of representatives from China were not the main focus of this study, but their views on communication in the context of investment facilitation would be equally interesting and important to consider in further research. A more balanced study incorporating the views of both parties would allow stronger claims to be made about the power dynamics unfolding between Chinese representatives and their co-operation partners.

This study also raises several questions that are relevant on a wider scale. With regard to the dictum 'when in Rome, do as Romans do' could China become the new 'Rome' of the world? Will the 'local moral order' that operates globally become more and more 'Chinese' and thus require subsequent positioning from others – not only people in China as expatriates, but also those in their home countries dealing with China? In that case, people working in the same domain in other countries may, depending on their cultural starting point, need to make adjustments similar to those described here. As China rises, becoming a global power, even developed countries need to adjust to this emerging economy, as its influence becomes pervasive. Is this mode of adjustment universal around the world when dealing with China? What are the specific ways different countries adjust or refuse to adjust when trying to attract Chinese investment? What are the limits of adjustment directed by the fragmentary nature of investment facilitation as a form of interaction?

The study also raises a set of questions regarding possible processes of change in China and their potential affect. How will China itself change as a result of its globalization process? Will its work norms, e.g. hours of work or expectations for planning, change through this process? How much will these possible shifts be affected by the government and how much by venture capitalists? Will government officials remain traditional in their thinking in the future? How much will change, or remain consistent, on a larger scale?

New contributions and revisions would also be welcome, about approaches on power positioning and the search for common ground. Regarding common ground formation, several questions about relationship-building can be raised for consideration in future studies. All relationships take time to build, but where can this time be found? How 'deep' should the relationship be, if its goal is a simple business interaction?

Several more specific questions arise from particular topics addressed in the articles. Regarding humour, Chinese adjustments to the perceived Western style of humour and its imitation in negotiations could be an interesting topic to consider in future research, as could also be the Chinese and other nationalities' perceptions of the Finnish sense of humour in particular. Few studies have addressed national styles of humour in face-to-face interactions (Grindsted, 1997), and there is a great deal of interest in this topic as an aspect of small talk in ne-

gotiations. Skilful use of humour has great implications for building common ground.

Developments in language use also continue to deserve the attention in future research. For instance, in view of ongoing technological advances, will new interpretation devices gain popularity in negotiation settings? What is an 'ideal' interpreter and intermediary? As the new generation enters positions of power, will English be used directly more often by Chinese representatives? Or, as the position of China becomes more important on a global scale, will its representatives insist on speaking Mandarin in spite of their competency in English? How can sufficient common ground in language be ensured to avoid misunderstandings and moving on with specific goals in investment facilitation?

This study found practicality and pragmatism to be characteristic of both Finnish and Chinese working cultures. At least in part, the historical origins of these cultures can be traced back to the Confucian heritage in the case of China, and the Protestant work ethic in the case of Finland. While their origins are different, the similarities between these cultures appear to offer common ground between the parties. This finding could be of practical relevance for business actors and would be worthy of further investigation for practical applications.

Additional observations would allow stronger claims to be made about patterns in seeking common ground and power positioning. State agencies for investment attraction tend to prefer to keep their customer information and their working strategies to themselves. While it is generally difficult to gain access to negotiations in investment facilitation situations, insights gained from prolonged observational studies would be very valuable.

5.6 Final remarks

As Goodfrey-Smith (2003) observed, the aim of science is to track and anticipate the patterns in experience. While it is possible to make predictions about future occurrences by attending to previous patterns, the accuracy of such predictions is never guaranteed. This study has characterized some dynamic aspects of power and common ground arising in the context of investment co-operation with China. These observations could be useful for specialists working on similar initiatives in the future. However, this research project may also face limitations in these future applications because circumstances may change; at times they change radically over a short period. Nevertheless, an increased understanding of intercultural dynamics within this setting offers guidance in defining new areas in need of further research.

As can be seen from the results of this study, some aspects of traditional culture discussed in previous research may still manifest themselves in certain situations, so it is impossible to say they are no longer relevant. There are of course situations when they are clearly irrelevant; both realities co-exist, and balance lies somewhere in-between. Reality is complex and transcends dichotomies. We are not prisoners of culture, but we cannot totally escape its influ-

ence, either. To some extent, I can justify the essentialist use of the word 'culture' I have adopted at times because the participants themselves used terms related to culture in these ways.

It is possible to push ethnographic interpretation forward towards greater precision and broader relevance, but it is not possible to write a general theory of cultural interpretation. Even if it were possible it would not be useful, because the essential task of theory building is 'not to codify abstract regularities, but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them' (Geertz, 1973, p. 23).

SUMMARY

Introduction

China's rise is a term that refers to China's march to global dominance, the speed of its economic growth, and its investment around the world during last two decades. Previously, most direct investment partnerships between China and the rest of the world took place in mainland China, and most of the existing literature addressed this form of investment (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2010), focusing mainly on economic and political factors. China's economic trajectory has inspired and informed a proliferating scholarship on its implications for potential global power restructuring, recognizing that China's unprecedented economic development over the last 30 years is creating the conditions for an inevitable power shift (Schweller & Pu, 2011).

The cultural adjustment towards Chinese norms has been predominantly studied as an expatriate experience in China (Selmer, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2014). At times this literature involves a 'traditional "foreign-expatriate-in-China" complex, viewing China and the Chinese as "them" who need to be motivated, educated, managed and controlled by "we"' (Fang, 2012a, p. 969). As investments flow in the opposite direction, the people in so-called Western nations are more often in a 'selling' position, offering investment opportunities to the Chinese or trying to gain a foothold in the vast Chinese market. These changes in power dynamics make intercultural communication between Chinese representatives and their international partners an interesting and important topic to study.

Interest in attracting Chinese investment has increased in Europe since the global financial crisis of 2007–2008. For a long time, Europeans have headed to China as investors and clients, but nowadays the picture is more complicated and the roles are often reversed. Investment promotion agencies compete for Chinese investment and have adopted various schemes of incentives (Schüler-Zhou *et al.*, 2012). The Baltic region has not been a major destination for Chinese investments to date. Finland has established governmental agencies to aid Chinese investment and ensured the co-operation of regional and local governments in such framework activities as town twinning. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland released the China Action Plan in 2010, which recognizes the role of China on the international scene and lists priority areas for co-operation. Finland is paying a lot of attention to investment promotion and facilitation; this policy direction involves dedicated organizations for this purpose, information campaigns, soft landing services, promotion of investment targets, and state co-ordination between investors and companies in need of investment.

Both attracting Chinese investment and promoting Finnish products in the Chinese market involves the Finns taking a marketing role. In practice, marketing products and investment opportunities are often connected, as investments are raised to develop products to be introduced in the Chinese market. An important element in investment facilitation and wider co-operation consists of delegation visits by each interested nation to the other. These involve enterprise matchmaking events, meetings with officials, company visits, etc. While these

activities between China and Finland have been ongoing for years, matching interests, finding common ground, and maintaining partnerships is still considered to be challenging. Wang (2007), who has studied Sino-Finnish partnerships, has observed that finding the right strategy of collaboration is not easy; partnerships often dissolve before their stated goals are achieved. The motivation for co-operation is based in each case on a country's own needs, interests, and development strategies, which can be difficult to match with those of the other side. In addition to investment, Chinese representatives coming to Finland may also be interested in technology transfer and exchange programmes to train their personnel.

The overarching aim of this study was to investigate the emerging power dynamics between Finns as marketers of investment opportunities and products and Chinese as investors, buyers, and partners. Component research questions, formulated from the most general to more specific aspects, were as follows: What insights can be drawn from this context about intercultural communication and the meanings and interpretations attributed by its participants? What new theoretical insights can be gained into the interplay between power positioning and finding common ground in negotiation? What role does the 'rise of China' play in the intercultural negotiation and search for common ground between Finnish and Chinese representatives? What does the everyday reality of those doing the job of investment, co-operation, and trade facilitation between China and Finland look like?

This study is ethnographic in nature, seeking to understand intercultural communication and the meanings and interpretations attached to it by participants. The study contributes new empirical data to ethnographic research in multicultural workplaces. The perspective of Finnish representatives provided in this study may be similar in some respect to those of other small developed countries wanting to co-operate with China. It may also be relevant to interested Chinese representatives who want to achieve a better understanding of this context. As the whole world is now approaching China in similar ways and power relations are shifting in favour of China, the insights arising from this study may be applicable on a wider scale in other, similar settings.

Theoretical and methodological framework

As this study proceeded from a general interest in Chinese–Finnish intercultural negotiation to the context of investment, trade and co-operation facilitation, I found an inductive approach to be most appropriate and relevant. This choice also promised to uncover new dynamics and nuances in communication more effectively, rather than proceeding from or confirming dichotomies or simplistic assumptions. Thus, I decided to perform an ethnographic study. The main focus of this research project is to observe and subsequently analyze intercultural communication from the perspectives of its participants. Ethnographic research consists of 'noticing, discovering, and recording communication practices that are significant to those being studied' (Carbaugh, 2005, p. 132), mak-

ing an attempt to understand the meanings of particular practices from the perspective of the participants themselves.

Theoretical constructs were introduced into the research process in an inductive manner. Theories that were relevant to the main themes that emerged in the process of data analysis were used as resources to interpret the negotiation context described. Three main theories used in the research articles were the Positioning Theory developed by Harré (1991), the Speech Codes Theory of Philipsen (1997), and the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

This study predominantly builds on Harré's (1991) Positioning Theory, which has been referred to in four of the research articles included in this dissertation. This theory addresses power, positioning, and accommodation in intercultural communication, and invokes the actors' need to attend to local moral orders; it centres on the view that the local distribution of rights and duties motivates different kinds of actions thus drives the way episodes unfold. As shifting power dynamics turned out to be an important element in this study, this theory offered an explanation of how actors positioned themselves in response to unfolding narratives, re-orienting and adjusting their position (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, 1997) and its updated version (Philipsen *et al.*, 2005) were developed specifically for the ethnography of communication. This theory was used mostly in the earlier stages of this study and is referred to in the second article, which focuses on the search for common ground. I used Speech Codes Theory to interpret certain cultural aspects observed in the context of communication, as this is an original cultural theory of human communication. Speech codes are understood as 'systems of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct' (Philipsen, 1997, p.126).

Finally, in the two final articles, on humour and language choices, I also used the Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987). I decided to use this theory because, during data analysis, I began to see some parallels between this theory's concepts of autonomy and affiliation and my own chosen concepts of power and common ground. It also appeared relevant because participants in the study used the concept of 'face' to explain their actions, and this is also one of the central concepts of Politeness Theory. The concept of 'face' was introduced by Goffman (1967, p. 5) to refer to the 'image of self', but Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) interpret it in terms of 'public self-image'. 'Facework' involves accommodating two different 'face' needs: the need for autonomy and the need for affiliation, one of which may be stronger in a particular culture. For instance, boasting is a particular form of self-presentation, which relates to 'facework' (Scollon & Scollon, 1983). Thus, two different 'face' needs impact the search for common ground; the 'face' of affiliation is in favour of it, while the 'face' of autonomy may work against it.

To assess the dynamics of Chinese investment, trade and co-operation facilitation, one of my research techniques was observation. Observations were

oriented initially by a broad interest in intercultural encounters within the context studied, and the phenomena observed informed interview questions later on. I was able to observe six days of interaction in total, including the Chinese delegation visiting Turku in Finland from Tianjin (October 2013) and in the Finnish delegation visiting Suzhou in China from Oulu (May 2014). The visit from Tianjin to Turku took place in the framework of town twinning and involved meetings at a local university and with the local government. Meanwhile, the delegation from Oulu visited Suzhou to promote a Finnish company in China, which involved meetings with representatives of local education institutions, the local government, and a business consultant.

This study's main methodological approach consisted of ethnographic interviews to establish the meanings that representatives of Finland assigned to their intercultural encounters with their Chinese partners in co-operation and trade facilitation (Emerson *et al.*, 1995). Becoming familiar with people in the setting opens up possibilities to conduct ethnographic interviews during participant observation (Spradley, 1980a). Thus, some interviews were conducted immediately after my initial observation of the Chinese delegation's visit to the city of Turku. Regarding the interviews at the state investment facilitation agency, I did an assignment for the organization, collecting information about their counterpart organizations in the Baltic States. I worked on this task at home, searching online for investment facilitation organizations in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and organizing basic information, including contacts, into a database. In return, I was granted interviews with three employees of this agency. Thus, I carried out a total of nine interviews in the autumn of 2013 at the China Finland Golden Bridge office in Helsinki as well as in local government offices in Turku and Lahti. The ages of those I interviewed ranged from mid-20s into their 60s. Four were representatives of local or regional governments; three were team members of a state investment attraction agency, and two were Chinese interpreters working for Finnish organizations. The length of experience these informants had in co-operation with China ranged from four to 20 years. Two Finns also had experience living and working in China, one for five years and another for six years. The Chinese interviewees had lived in Finland for between five and 20 years.

In analyzing the observation and interview data, I used a fluid approach, beginning with a developmental research method, progressing to a close reading of the transcripts, content analysis, and finally, thick description. The material was examined several times with the help of various data analysis methods to discern the broader context and the connections between individual instances observed and interview utterances. Data were categorized according to themes and then combined to provide a thick description of the communication dynamics in the given context. As new categories emerged, and the analytic focus developed, each major theme in data was gradually developed into an article. Adjustment to the expectations of Chinese representatives, strategies in search of common ground, and the guest–host positioning were the predominant themes found in the data. The role of humour and aspects related to language

were two smaller, more specific themes that were developed into articles, as well.

Discussion of main findings

Turning to the contribution of each article, article I was an example of a traditional approach to cultural differences and adjustment. However, the picture was made more complex by the examination of instances when the adjustment is refused or not necessary. In article II, the analysis became more sophisticated, as it was found that the stances taken did not only involve adjusting or not adjusting, but also imposing on the other side and drawing on existing common ground. While analyzing the data for the third article, I was able to identify even more nuances to the situation and scenarios affecting power positioning. For instance, beyond the narrative of 'rising China,' there is also a narrative of 'China as a developing country,' and the roles of guest and host and hosting traditions contribute to how powerful or powerless the representatives feel and their resulting actions. The article also revealed another possible response in power positioning and seeking common ground: the 'soft power' involved in presenting one's own expertise, culture, and traditions. In addition, two more specific article themes – humour and language – turned out to be the sites where power positioning and the search for common ground also occur. The main dynamic in this case consisted in both sides making adjustments to some degree in search of common ground. However, Finnish representatives appeared to make them more often, while Chinese representatives more often signalled their own autonomy and concern for 'face'. Article IV on humour drew attention to the fifth response regarding power and common ground – the stance of autonomy. Finally, article V on language choices pointed to the observation that the factors impacting positioning could be divided into external and internal ones.

While drawing together the findings of all articles, it was possible to construct new categories that promoted a deeper and more comprehensible analysis of the overall results. It appeared fruitful to go through the articles one more time and to categorize main points and instances discussed under one of the five approaches towards power and common ground that had emerged.

Adjustment was the leading strategy in the data, and was employed by both Finnish and Chinese representatives. While there were many more instances of Finnish adjustment, existing common ground and 'soft power' appeared to be used by Chinese and Finns equally. Hedging/pressure was a strategy more typical of Finnish representatives, while the stance of autonomy was more frequently seen among Chinese representatives. The overall trend was for Finnish representatives to use active strategies such as adjustment and hedging more often, while the Chinese appeared to be 'cooler' regarding co-operation and more often retreated to autonomy. This confirms the observation made in article II that Finns appear to be more driven by the need for actual co-operation and results, while Chinese partners seem able to afford just to explore and to choose among various partners around the world.

Furthermore, it appeared fruitful to analyze these five approaches along a continuum from strongest to weakest in terms of the degree of power involved. Pressure/hedging is the most direct use of power, attempting to change another actor's response to accommodate one's own expectations or requirements. However, such a strategy can only be successful if accepted by the interlocutor. 'Soft power' is milder in nature, but also involves coming forward with a certain confidence in one's own culture, traditions, or expertise. Meanwhile, autonomy can be seen in turn predominantly as a demonstration of power in a disinterested and disassociated way, without either affecting the interlocutor or adjusting one's own position. Common ground allows for maximal equality for the sides involved. Finally, adjustment means accepting a less powerful position for the sake of increasing common ground.

Considering the implications of each response for the formation of common ground, it can be concluded that the degree of power involved does not necessarily correspond to interest in common ground; power can be shown in both interested (engaged) and disinterested (autonomous) ways. Therefore, there is no direct connection between how much power is asserted and how much common ground is gained. Two diametrically opposite strategies — pressure and adjustment — can both be successful for building common ground under certain circumstances. Most crucial is the interested stance and favourable response of the other actor to the strategy employed.

Exploring the distinct qualities of each stance towards power and common ground and comparing them, a parallel with the Chinese five elements theory (*Wu Xing*) emerged. This study produced the novel finding that each approach could be seen to correspond to one of the elements, or phases, recognized in the theory. I depicted both generating and overcoming cycles in relation to the approaches towards power and common ground, demonstrating how one stance could shift into another. I first explained in general terms how a change could occur and then gave an example from the study data. Building on this dynamic of change of phases within cycles, it is possible to argue further that it is natural in negotiations for pressure/hedging, soft power, autonomy, use of common ground, and adjustment to succeed one another at various times.

To illustrate this insight, I developed an original model of a rope, claiming that as when tying a rope or braid, co-operating sides in negotiation usually start off as separate strands. Autonomy, separation, and lack of interest, while they may appear unfavourable to the search for common ground, are often natural parts of the process, especially in the beginning. When the rope is being tied together, then, at certain points one strand needs to come over another. Likewise, taking the lower power position of adjustment, or accepting that another positions you this way, is a natural dynamic needed to create common ground and tie the parties together. In a somewhat similar fashion, the parallel of rope can also be used to represent the intertwining of power and common ground. When existing common ground is being used, power and common ground are separate strands and do not intersect; this is a favourable situation and neutral in terms of power. However, in the case of adjustment, common

ground supersedes power positioning, and one party accepts a lower power position for the sake of building common ground. On the contrary, in the stance of autonomy, power takes pre-eminence over common ground. The same situation can arise when using pressure and hedging: if another side is not responding well, power will be demonstrated at the expense of common ground. I have shown culture to be intertwined with both the strand of power and the strand of common ground.

The articles have drawn attention to a variety of external and internal factors influencing positioning, which further reveals the complexity of the dynamics of power and common ground. For instance, one of the most important factors is the role one has in an interaction and what that implies about power. From the data of this study, it was possible to see the following role-pairs: seller–buyer, promoter–investor, service provider–customer, consultant–trainee, and guest–host. Most of these pairs imply unequal power positions, usually in favour of the Chinese representatives. Roles (a relatively static notion) or positions (a more flexible term), provide a crucial basic reference system for untangling power relationships and the search for common ground. However, multiple roles or positions can coexist or succeed each other at different times even in the course of one visit, affecting power and common ground. Among the most important internal factors were considerations of ‘face’ and pre-existing discourses or narratives about the partner country.

This study presents a theoretical contribution to the understanding of power positioning and seeking common ground in intercultural negotiation. It takes its point of departure from the concepts of positioning and narratives, which have not previously been prevalent in the field of intercultural communication. The main theoretical contribution of this dissertation is building a model that identifies various stances towards power and common ground and includes the factors influencing these choices. Drawing together and synthesizing concepts from Positioning Theory, Politeness Theory, and the concept of common ground, and borrowing such terms as ‘soft power’ and hedging from international relations, a new and more comprehensive understanding of these negotiation phenomena has been offered as a five-fold response scheme. Using the cultural resources of traditional Chinese philosophical thought, the distinct character and fluid nature of these five approaches towards power and common ground has been demonstrated.

The practical contribution of this study is to illustrate the dynamics arising between a new, emerging power and an older, developed one, which certainly has implications for broader co-operation situations between developed economies seeking to revitalize themselves and emerging economies on the rise. The study offers a new contribution to the field of intercultural communication as an empirical study focused on power dynamics in intercultural communication. The novelty and usefulness of the findings relate to how the power positioning interacts with the search for common ground.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

"THE CHINESE WILL NOT CHANGE, WE HAVE TO CHANGE:" ADJUSTMENT OF THE FINNS TO THE CHINESE IN A CHINESE INVESTMENT FACILITATION CONTEXT

by

Stopniece, Santa 2017b

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**“The Chinese Will Not Change; We Have To Change”:
Adjustment of the Finns to the Chinese
in a Chinese Investment Facilitation Context**

Abstract

This paper explores the intercultural communication, cultural adjustment strategies and power relations between Finnish and Chinese representatives in the context of Chinese investment facilitation in Finland. The study is mostly based on interviews of individuals who work either for one of Finland’s state agencies tasked with attracting investment or local government. When analyzing aspects of power, the paper’s theoretical basis is the Positioning Theory of Harré (1991). Due to the phenomenon of ‘rising China’, the dominant discursive practice of the Finnish positioning is adaption to a communication and working style seen as typically Chinese. The results show the main aspects of Chinese culture, to which Finns see need of adjusting, are their distinct concepts of time, indirectness and overt hierarchy.

Keywords: Chinese investments, Finland, cultural adjustment, power, positioning, intercultural communication, rising China

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the topic and the purpose of the paper

Rising China or *China’s rise* is a term that refers to China’s march to being number one, the speed of its economic growth, and its investment around the world during last two decades. Previously the majority of foreign direct investment projects between partners from China and the rest of the world have taken place in mainland China, and most studies have addressed this direction of investment (Fetscherin *et al.* 2010), focusing mainly on economic and political factors. The cultural adjustment to the Chinese has been predominantly studied as an expatriate experience in China (Selmer 1999; Wang *et al.* 2014). At times this literature suffers from a traditional ‘foreign-expatriate-in-China’ complex, viewing China and the Chinese as ‘them’ who need to be motivated, educated, managed and controlled by ‘we’ (Fang 2012:969). As investments flow in the opposite direction, the people in so-called Western nations are more often taking the position of the ‘seller,’ offering investment targets to the Chinese or trying to gain a foothold in the huge Chinese market. The changes in the power dynamics make intercultural communication between the Chinese and their international partners an interesting and important topic to study.

Interest in attracting Chinese investment has increased in Europe since the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. Investment promotion agencies compete for Chinese investment and adopt various welcome schemes (Schüler-Zhou *et al.* 2012:157). In Finland, a government platform called the China Finland Golden Bridge has been established to facilitate Chinese investment, and other agencies, including regional and local governments, are actively involved. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland released the China Action Plan in 2010 which recognizes the role of China on the international scene and lists the priority areas for co-operation. Finland, and the Baltic Sea region as a whole, has not been a major destination for Chinese investments to date. However, Chinese interest in the region has increased in recent years, as has

awareness in Finland of the possibilities relating to Chinese investments (Kaartemo 2007). Although Finland is a developed country, its position in Europe is still comparatively marginal and the economy in the 2010s has been hit by Nokia's demise, on which it was largely dependent (The Economist 2012). Finland is maintaining a lot of effort into developing investment attraction organizations. The work of investment agencies with the Chinese investors is a comparatively new and little researched aspect of co-operation with China.

This paper explores intercultural communication and emerging power relations between Finns as sellers of investment targets and Chinese as investors. Using the case of Finland, the paper provides insights into a newly developing intercultural communication context that also may have similarities with Chinese investment facilitation initiatives elsewhere in the world. The central questions of the paper are: What kind of a role does the 'rise of China' play in the intercultural negotiation between Finnish and Chinese representatives when attracting Chinese investment? How this new context reflects on the cultural adjustment between the co-operating sides?

1.2 Previous research

Traditional research into business communication has emphasized the differences between China and the so-called West, at times producing sweeping generalizations and dichotomies. For example, Hofstede's (1980:98) prominent study suggests that one of the main contrasts can be expected along the dimension of power distance, as Chinese society has a steeper hierarchy and people tend to demonstrate greater deference towards those in power than in Western societies. Hall (1983:44) has explored the concept of time in various cultures, distinguishing between monochronic time orientation countries, to which most Western societies belong, and polychronic time orientation countries, which include China. In a monochronic time system, time is linear, scheduled, and segmented, while in the polychronic orientation, several things can be done at the same time and plans are changed often and easily. Since many professionals working with China have been reading these studies or materials based on them, the possible impact of these dichotomies on their perception cannot be ruled out.

Another set of literature focuses on the aspects of traditional working Chinese culture, seeing its base mainly in Confucianism. Ock Yum (1997:85) identifies indirect communication as one of the characteristic traits in Chinese working life, which "helps to prevent the embarrassment of disagreement among partners, leaving the relationship and each other's 'face' intact." The people in Confucian societies, China including, may not rely on verbalized, logical expressions, but derive the communication dynamics from observing the nonverbal and circumstantial cues (Kim 1997). Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) list five distinctive characteristics of Chinese communication: 1) implicit communication (*hanxu*), 2) listening-centered communication (*tinghua*), 3) polite communication (*keqi*), 4) insider-communication (*zijiren*), and 5) face-directed communication (*mianzi*). While there may, indeed, be aspects of Confucian influence in the way that the Chinese conduct business, this literature may also produce some stereotypical perceptions regarding communication with the Chinese.

Recent scholarship has started to produce a much more nuanced image regarding communication with the Chinese. A recent research trend is considering traditional Chinese culture from a regional perspective, emphasizing regional differences (Shuping 2001:15-16). The concept of culture inherently implies openness and diversity within and needs a narrower focus (Wang 2011:5-6). Fang and Faure (2011) argue that communication behaviours that are contrary to traditional ones are equally evident in Chinese society, given different situations, contexts and times. The interaction between traditional Chinese values, modernization and Western influence may create cultural expressions that can be quite unexpected. For instance, Chinese colour culture in business contexts can be divided into traditional and modern (Kommonen 2008:4-5). The

influence of Confucianism remains a significant part of Chinese cultural values, but globalization and the emergence of capitalism have propelled the Chinese people to become extremely changeable (Chuang 2004:53). The divide between the West and the Rest is no longer correct, as traces of the West are now found everywhere, and vice versa (Morley 2011:120). In addition, as growing up in a country contributes to an individual's values, beliefs and behaviour, so does acculturation into a particular field or profession (Jameson 2007). In a globalizing world, the meaning of culture is complex and the dynamic processes of cultural change are ongoing (Leung et al. 2009). In a study on British-Chinese meetings, it was discovered that the Chinese were dissatisfied due to inappropriate seating arrangements and perceived lack of gratitude over Chinese contracts, factors of which British side was not aware of (Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2003:38-39). Prior rumours heard about the business strongly influenced the Chinese side's expectations (Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2003:44). These studies show a variety of other influencing factors on communication besides those of traditional culture.

Critical intercultural communication tradition is an important and relevant part of the field as well. In their review of its critical junctures, Haluani, Mendoza, and Drzewiecka (2009:17-18) state that this approach is characterized by focus on the issues of power, context, an historical or structural forces as they affect intercultural communication. Critical turn took place in 1980s when some scholars such as Asante (1980) argued that cultural groups need to be historically contextualized for fully understanding their communication practices. Starosta and Chen (2003) argue that communication scholars have explored "how" and "what" of intercultural communication, but not the "why." Within this view, culture is seen as a power struggle, where its unstable formation stems from prevailing nationalistic, economic, and structural interests (Haluani, Mendoza, and Drzewiecka 2009: 26).

In summary, studies to date have mainly outlined the differences between Chinese and so-called Western communication styles and have described how Chinese traditional values may affect business interactions. However, some studies also reflect on the way that the forces of modernization may change traditional culture, the differences across various professional groups, and the ways context and power influence communication. The current situation is dynamic, so the update is necessary whether and how traditional Chinese cultural values or related stereotypes currently play a role in intercultural communication. There is also a lack of research on communication in the context of attracting Chinese investment, where the Chinese side tends to exert more power. The study intends to bring together and analyze the aspects of culture and power in communication, revealing the new power relation dynamics in the context of growing importance of China. In the past, the representatives of so-called Western nations were heading to China in the role of buyers and investors, but nowadays oftentimes the roles are reversed. As investments start to flow in the opposite direction, there are negotiations and adjustments going on that are not prevalent in more established forms of co-operation.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This study builds on positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1991), which addresses power, positioning and accommodation in intercultural communication. The theory involves the need to attend to local moral orders, and centres on the view that local distribution of rights and duties determine different kinds of acts and the way episodes unfold. There is the option of multiple choices for an individual to position themselves in response to the unfolding narrative and to change and adjust their position (Davies and Harré 1990). Positioning theory is most suitable for addressing the dynamic context of attracting Chinese investment, where both traditional and modern cultural values are present and power relations are being actively negotiated. Concerning the concept of power in intercultural communication, the approach of 'power as described' (Jensen 2006) will be utilized. This approach treats power as a description of how people define their own

actions in relation to power, so it is especially suitable for analyzing the statements of interviewees. Power will also be understood as an outcome of interactions within structures where people are placed in different positions and must make communication choices accordingly (Isotalus 2006).

There are asymmetries for social action in the resources that are available to each individual in concrete circumstances. A cluster of short-term disputable rights, obligations and duties is called a position, and it determines the way people have access to cultural resources (Harré 2012:192-194). An individual calculates the gains and losses while adjusting their own position; so for instance, having an interest in a felicitous business outcome may affect the willingness to adjust. For a long time, people in the so-called Western nations visited China in the role of buyers, but now in some contexts there is a shift of paradigm and the relational buyer-seller roles may have been exchanged. The Chinese may be the ones who invest and buy, so the asymmetry of power may make their co-operation partners willing to adjust.

Harré and Moghaddam (2003b:138) argue that many important interactions between nation states take place in the form of small-scale interactions between very few representatives. The investment facilitation is such context where Finnish and Chinese representatives meet and most often have interactions within a small group. Sustaining intergroup harmony requires that a certain range of interpretations for an individual's actions are pre-established, but positions can also be challenged or revised. The positions can be internally inconsistent and externally contested (Louis 2008:23). Thus, co-operating partners may not have final clarity how to act in a certain situation and may have various, even opposing scenarios at hand – to adjust versus to push for own way of doing things. Regarding positions being externally contested, other participants may not accept the positioning insisted by someone and challenge it with their own narrative. Although, the main mode in the co-operation and investment attraction context is expected to be co-operative, at times own power may be asserted at the expense of finding common ground. This study will address these conflicting aspects in communications dynamics, since the positioning cannot be treated as a simplistic matter. Each participant has choices to make, taking into consideration perceptions of various aspects in the situation.

1.4 Methodology and materials

This paper builds on data collected as a part of doctoral dissertation research project. The study's main methodological approach was interviewing for the purpose of learning the meanings that the Finnish representatives assign to their intercultural encounters with Chinese co-operation partners. Some participant observation was also conducted to give access to naturally occurring intercultural communication, and to provide a fuller sense of the context. Observation, for six days in total, took place during delegation visits from Tianjin to Turku in Finland and from Oulu to Suzhou in China.

This paper is mostly based on nine interviews carried out in the autumn of 2013 in the China Finland Golden Bridge (Finland's state agency for Chinese investment attraction) office in Helsinki and in local government offices of Turku and Lahti. The interviewees were aged from their mid-20s to 60s and had experience in Chinese investment co-operation of between 4 and 20 years. The interviewees were coded IV1-9 according to gender, country of origin and working title (see Table 1).

Table 1. Interviewee codes and basic data

Code	Gender	Country of origin	Title
IV1	female	Japan	Business Development Officer
IV2	male	China	Interpreter
IV3	male	Finland	Development Manager

IV4	female	China	Interpreter
IV5	male	Finland	Senior Advisor
IV6	male	Finland	Head of International Affairs
IV7	male	China	Business Development Manager
IV8	female	Finland	Customer Operations Director
IV9	male	Finland	General Manager

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, encouraging interviewees to offer their own definitions of particular activities (Silverman 2006; Briggs 1986) and broadly addressing the experiences of working with the Chinese. The interviews were conducted in English, recorded and transcribed.

Close reading of the study data allowed some recurrent patterns to be found. The research material was sorted according to the cultural categories used by participants and how these are related to concrete working activities (Silverman 2006). Data were also used as discourse materials and cultural examples of the topic area being studied (Alasuutari 1995). Reflective use of interview materials as discourse data has clear benefits in providing insight into topics and their characteristics in specific cultural contexts (Nikander 2012:34). In a qualitative framework, research based on interviews seeks to manifest meanings; therefore, a small number of cases facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents and inquiry in naturalistic settings (Crouch 2006).

In the process of data analysis, the adjustment to Chinese cultural specifics emerged as one of the most important discourses and considerations in interviewee's answers, connecting together several smaller topics related to culture. These topics dealt with the concepts of time, indirectness and hierarchy. The findings presented in this paper include reflections on the differences within these categories in social situations, attributes associated with them, and dimensions of contrast discovered within each category (Spradley 1980).

2. New power relations in Chinese-Finnish investment facilitation initiatives

2.1 *Need to adjust to the Chinese to be able to work with them*

Throughout the interviews it was possible to trace an overriding trend that the Finnish participants believed they need to adjust to cultural specifics and the communication style of the Chinese representatives. Their motivation is in the economic gains and broader context of the so-called 'rising China' phenomenon:

China will be one of the leading countries in the world, and I think in the future they will dictate the rules more, because they are strong. We certainly want to be successful, so we have to adjust to them. Finland is a small country and this will continue to be the case. (IV6)
By any calculation, China is becoming number one in exports, the economy, and also, I guess, in innovation. All the countries are approaching China at the moment, and they are in the position of picking who they want to work with. You can even kind of benefit from the Chinese working in a different way, but you need to understand those ways, you need to learn, you need to work with them. (IV8)

So part of the frame for positioning in favor of adjustment to the Chinese is that China is seen as 'big' and 'strong' and Finland as 'small' and in need to be competitive. However, the awareness of the rise of China appears to be comparatively recent, as traditionally China has been seen as a developing country:

Attitudes towards China have changed in Finland in last four or five years. Previously it was quite challenging to get Finnish companies to even meet Chinese companies, as they had copyright concerns. But now it is more in the media and inevitable that China is becoming number one. People are starting to think –we have to work with the Chinese in the future, so they want to adjust and to learn more about China. (IV8)

The broader context of China on the way of becoming ‘the number one’ is a motivation, in words of the interviewees, to ‘understand,’ to ‘learn,’ and to ‘adjust.’

However, at times participants expressed the belief that in the process of globalization, they and the Chinese will have to change - “both have to travel a little bit towards the middle. As China becomes more global, they will also change” (IV8). The same idea was expressed by IV7 who believes that “if Chinese companies operate in different countries, it’s good to localize a little bit so that people can work very effectively and productively.”

To sum up, while the leading discursive positioning in interviewees answers appears to be “the Chinese will not change, we have to change,” occasionally belief is expressed that the Chinese will change as well. Moving to the specific ways of cultural adjustment to the Chinese and the accommodation of what is perceived as their communication style, three main cultural categories by the interviewees will be considered.

3.2 Adjusting the working rhythm to the Chinese sense of time

One area that appeared very topical in most interviews was the need to adjust to the Chinese working rhythm and their sense of time. Interviewees said that the working hours for the Chinese are not limited as is usually the case in Finland, so there may be a need to answer the phone, check messages, or be on Skype at weekends – “if it is an urgent issue, we will react at the weekend as well” (IV1).

I have adapted the way I work to the Chinese model, which is very flexible. During the weekends I have had several conversations with the Chinese - I keep my phone on so everybody is welcome to call. (IV9)

An important difference regarding work timing, as outlined by several interviewees, is the speed of action in China, requiring a fast response - “they often really appreciate getting a quick response to quick questions.” (IV9)

Finland is a smaller nation, so our response speed is slower and sometimes that amazes the Chinese if they are used to very quick responses. Finns maybe need to learn to respond quickly, for example, when Chinese when venture capitalists are expecting information from a Finnish company. The Finns might think – maybe I will send it next week. And Chinese investors think – ok, they are not even interested. (IV8)

Furthermore, according to the interviewees the Chinese style tends to be more doing things at the last moment than planning ahead, and this affects the preparation of delegation visits:

Confirmation and the calendar in Chinese people’s minds are totally different. Finns think about six months ahead, but talking to a Chinese of something a month ahead, they are like - let’s talk later about that, this is not relevant now. (IV8)

You are caught between the two – the Finnish people want confirmation, I know that I will not get the final confirmation until maybe two days before, or in the worst case after you have arrived in China. And there are always changes of plans. (IV1)

The observation activities of this study confirmed this trend. For the Chinese visit from Tianjin to Turku, the schedule was prepared, available in advance, and carried out with no changes. However, the Finnish visit to China did not have a schedule and there was information about only a few possible meetings and their approximate times. Most of the meetings were arranged on the spot in China, using some personal connections of the Chinese assistant. The only meeting that had a precise time set in advance was with a Finnish organization operating in China. The flexible approach to scheduling may have also correlated to the comparatively small size of the largely informal delegation to China. Anyways arranging the meetings on the spot appeared to work more effectively.

To deal with differences in planning ahead, the interviewees emphasized that the Finns need to adjust, be flexible, and learn to deal with any uncertainty:

If you want to work with the Chinese, you have to accept some cultural differences, and this is one of them. If you don't accept it, or you can't really cope with it, then it's quite likely that you will not work with the Chinese anyway. (IV8)

I don't think that the Chinese way of working changes with whomever they are dealing with; it is more about our learning. Just try to be flexible. You know that there'll always be a surprise at the last moment. Just try to deal with the uncertainty. (IV1)

While the interviewees emphasized their most important need was to adjust to the working rhythm and sense of time in China, on some occasions they would also set some boundaries for their way of doing things and their convenience:

When dealing with Chinese, we are very flexible to any kind of situation, and at the same time maybe we try to let them know and understand that we are in Finland. So we have this Finnish working culture and working hours. (IV7)

Some concrete ways of setting the limits mentioned by interviewees were refusing to take calls or work on weekends. IV9 said that occasionally, "I tell them that we can talk on Monday." IV5 shared that "second year, I promised my wife that I would not go to work on Sundays." As a way to manage and balance the differences in planning ahead, IV1 practices "putting pressure on Finns to be realistic and flexible with planning, but for the Chinese, we put pressure on making and confirming plans."

In summary, the interviewees see the Chinese attitude towards work and time is different, more 'circular,' which also previous research has addressed. Observations of this study affirm that it has real-life relevance. The suggested coping strategy involves adjustment and changing the ways of working, such as having more flexibility regarding working hours, plans and schedules. However, it appears that only partial compliance with the coping strategy is the norm. When pressured to work in the evenings and weekends, at times Finns are liable to refuse to co-operate with Chinese sense of time. Referring to positioning theory, this tension can perhaps be related to the perceived value derived from communicative transactions. Economic gain is strong motivator to adjust; however, one's own work life balance is also important. It is possible to 'refuse' to accept the nature of the discourse through which a particular conversation takes place, and the positioning may involve shifts in power, access, or blocking of access (Davies & Harre 1990). Thus, to maintain a work life balance, the Finnish representatives may block communication and limit access on weekends, insisting on the power to do things own way even at the expense of possibly losing economic opportunities.

3.3 Accommodating Chinese indirectness

Another major area of differences that the interviewees saw the need to adjust to is the indirectness seen as characteristic of the Chinese, and difficulty of saying “no” in particular:

In some meetings it has been hard to get an answer to a very simple and frank question. But afterwards I noticed that this question was somehow problematic for them. You have to ask questions so that they don't have to give a negative answer, to give options. (IV6)

IV8 said: “You have to recognize certain characteristics in their communication so you can realize that they are just trying to say “no” in a very complicated way.”

During the observations, it also appeared that sometimes the Finns were wrestling with the indirectness of the Chinese. There was some vague general talk about co-operation from the Tianjin delegates in Turku. During the course of the meeting, the Finns kept asking questions and trying to make the co-operation more specific: “What is the procedure and specific requirements to establish the kind of alliance that was described by you? (...) How to incorporate the principles discussed regarding co-operation? (...) What is the actual meaning of the technology program that was mentioned by you in the introduction?” This way, they tried to clarify some of the terms mentioned by the Chinese. In the end, the next steps to take after the visit were listed, to make sure something results from this meeting. During the delegation visit from Oulu to Suzhou, it was observed that on several occasions the organizations visited showed enthusiasm about the idea and the product offered. However, the Finnish Chief Executive kept wondering if the interest was genuine or just politeness – it appears that it was difficult to tell the difference.

The interviewees suggested becoming more patient and learning to understand non-verbal cues as possible adjustment responses to indirectness:

I have adapted my forceful character - sometimes before this work, I immediately went to the point or reached an opinion, but now I have learned patience. I observe a little bit longer and hesitate to just jump to the conclusion. (IV8)

Even though we need to leave for the next appointment, the host just can't interrupt us to tell that we must leave now. I thought that a bit strange, but then I understood that it's not polite to interrupt others or tell the mayor what to do. Perhaps I should have understood by their behavior that they wanted to talk to me. (IV6)

Several interviewees also made connections to the concept of ‘face’ in the context of accommodating indirectness by Chinese representatives:

You have to consider the ‘face’ of that organization, so you do not say “no” now, because they are going to lose ‘face.’(IV1)

One time when we had some guests here, we were picking food from the lunch line. You are allowed to take one dish and not to touch the other ones. But Chinese would like to, and they were in the front, they saw and took. So saving everybody's ‘face,’ I did the same thing. (IV7)

Still, at times, being straightforward can be useful, and the Chinese can accept this way:

For the Chinese, saying “no” is hard. But in Finland, we try to be frank and open, so we give our opinion. And I guess that is something that they respect - that we don't play or give hints, but immediately say what we want. (IV6)

According to Ock Yum (1997:85), “indirect communication helps to prevent the embarrassment of rejection by the other person or disagreement among partners, leaving the relationship and each other’s ‘face’ intact.” One of communication phenomena in Chinese societies is the ‘pursuit of social harmony’ as a typical core value of Chinese daily life practices (Lee 2011:84-85). People strive for their communication to be ‘proper’ and in a way that is accepted in their society, but the understandings of ‘proper’ expression are various (Philipsen *et al.* 2005). Referring to the interviewees, differences in directness of communication may create confusion at times.

In the context of implied Chinese indirectness, Finns do try to adjust by using a more indirect way of asking something; by trying to read any non-verbal cues; and accommodating the Chinese so they do not lose ‘face.’ However, the possibility of being straightforward with the Chinese is also an option. Frankness is seen as a typical Finnish value which can be accepted in certain situational contexts. Here it is also evident that the main strategy is adjustment to the Chinese by trying to be more indirect. However, at times Finns use their own cultural resources, which can be seen as a sign of power (Harré 2012), and reportedly the Chinese at times, in turn, adjust to that. Apparently it is possible to mutually learn that the same polite values and attitudes can be expressed in different ways.

3.4 Adjusting to cultural specifics related to hierarchy

Traditional hierarchical thinking emerged as the third major area of adjustment of the Finns to the Chinese. Regarding hierarchy in general, IV7 said: “The hierarchical culture in China is still very strong. It has been there for about five thousand years and it’s something that makes the Chinese Chinese.”

Several interviewees believed the importance of seating for the Chinese as a manifestation of hierarchy needs to be respected:

These things don’t matter for us, but we have to remember, it matters for them. So if I sit beside the mayor, they will calculate – that’s the second most important man there, but perhaps we have not meant that at all. (IV6)

I was leading the meeting, but he was the host, so I thought he can sit opposite the Chinese side leader, so that he knows who the Finnish delegation leader is. Then the hierarchy went from the Finnish side I think more or less as it should. (IV1)

Another aspect of the importance of hierarchy appearing in the interviews was that Chinese want to meet people of similar position:

It helped enormously to be diplomatic, we were always able to meet people at least on the same level as we were, or a little bit higher. Then later on, we could use that contact to promote some business for some company. (IV5)

If there is a ministry-level person from China, there better be a ministry-level person from Finland. We really need to take care of this because we don’t want to lose our ‘face,’ which is one of China drivers. (IV8)

Adjustment to hierarchy may involve attuning body language and speaking less:

My facial and body language is maybe American, and the Chinese can sense this immediately, but I am controlling myself so that I try to be as Chinese as possible in front of them. I think I speak much less in front of the Chinese than before, because for the Chinese, when you are lower in the hierarchy, they expect you to speak less. (IV9)

When observing meetings, the presence of some hierarchical elements was also verified. During the visit from Tianjin to Turku, five members of the Chinese delegation took their seats according to hierarchy. The head of the delegation was sitting in the middle, two other important representatives next to him, and the assisting members – interpreter and most junior member were sitting on the sides. The head of the delegation did most of the talking, the delegate on his right hand side did some talking, but other members did not make any official addresses, only participated in the informal conversations during the breaks.

Another situation, which emphasized the notion of hierarchy, involved passing through a door. On several occasions, crowding and confusion occurred over who had precedence (male/female, junior/senior members of delegation, Finn or Chinese), who should hold the door, and the sequence of passage. Interactive encouragement ensured that with little delay, however, everyone passed through. As a similar situation would not normally occur in Finland, it appears the members of the Chinese delegation were anxious about the order of precedence passing through the door. Sensing the Chinese discomfort, the Finnish hosts tried to find the best way to address the situation.

During the observation of the visit of Finns from Oulu to Suzhou fewer elements related to hierarchy were observed. The most likely cause was that this was not a local government visit, but one between business connections. The size of the Finnish delegation was small and therefore meetings were generally less formal. However, the difficulty in arranging meetings with persons of influence was significant and required a lot of personal connections. For instance, two Chinese ladies spent several hours calling personal contacts before managing to arrange a meeting with an investor.

While the main trend is that Finnish representatives tend to accommodate the hierarchical manifestations of the Chinese, occasionally there also appear to be situations when it is not so important. Several interviewees outlined the difference between government officials and venture capitalists:

Venture capitalists usually have a background of studying in the U.S. or going to an international business school. They have been running funds all over the world, so these people are quite global-minded and then the cultural factors are smaller. With them, it is very to the point, they have strict, very tight schedule, and they only want to meet the investment targets. We don't have to have speeches, or stiff lunches or dinners. (IV8)

In a hierarchical structure, individuals are seen as having differing status, while at the same time they are considered as equally essential to the total system (Kim 1997). The interviewees, as a group, believe venture capitalists tend to be less traditional and therefore care less about hierarchy. It appears the Finns have learnt by experience of the characteristic hierarchical elements in Chinese behavior and then have tried to imitate them in their interactions with the Chinese. However, also experiencing situations where hierarchy is not so important offers the flexibility of not attending to hierarchical elements which, in the Finnish view complicate working life and environment. Here the positioning revealed by the Finnish side could be seen through the lens of sustaining intergroup harmony. To have harmony with more traditionally thinking Chinese, Finns attune to and attend to the hierarchical elements important to them. They allow themselves to be cast into certain positions by the dominant power (Louis 2008:23), which in this case appears to be the Chinese. However, sustaining harmony with the venture capitalists does not require as much attention to hierarchical elements, so Finns are freer to be at ease this aspect.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The results suggest that the importance of the 'rising China' discourse becomes part of a frame for Finns working to encourage Chinese investment. Consequently, Finns are taking account of, and adjusting to, a communication style that they see is characteristically Chinese. Positions tend to be taken up according to an unfolding narrative depending upon the outcomes they generate, and the current narrative is that of China becoming the supreme power combined with Finland's desired outcome to be economically successful. This positioning has emerged recently, as Finns have become more interested in attracting Chinese investments and co-operating in general. People tend to take care of relationships when they are important for achieving economic success (Isotalus 2006). All sellers have lower power in communication than buyers (Isotalus 2004). In the investment facilitation context, Finns are predominantly in the position of a seller to China, which puts pressure on them to adapt and conform to Chinese ways of doing business.

Positions are derived from patterns of similar beliefs by members in a relatively coherent speech community (Harré and Moghaddam 2003a). The Finnish participants did not see the rising China as a dominant competitor, but rather focused on the opportunities related to China and developing co-operative relationships (Louis 2008:23). They saw their work, especially in the China Finland Golden Bridge, as customer service operations, which may involve tolerating lack of confirmation and last minute changes that internationally are not considered good business etiquette. In some situations, Finns adopt an uncritical "customer is always right" attitude, which can be explained by the competitive environment in which investment promotion agencies operate. Finland has many initiatives for attracting Chinese investment, and tends towards the model of Eastern European countries, which offer strong investment facilitation incentives (Schüler-Zhou *et al.* 2012:165). Thus, it can be argued that even developed European countries, if they experience an economic downturn or are small or somewhat marginalized, may put serious effort into Chinese investment facilitation and cultural adjustment.

The pattern of adjustment was evident in real work situations: adjustment to the Chinese concepts of time, indirectness in communication, and overt hierarchy. These adaptations follow traditional characterizations of cultural differences discussed in some previous studies, for instance, polychronic versus monochronic time, high versus low context (Hall 1983), and power distance (Hofstede 1980). These findings can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it appears that the traditional elements in communication still matter, as they were not only referred to in interviews, but also discerned during the observations. Secondly, interviews at times can produce talk, which is informed by cultural dichotomies and stereotypes, as both the researcher and interviewees work in the field and have been reading and learning about these possible areas of differences. During data analysis, these categories are also perhaps easiest to notice. While the starting point is two cultural or national groups – Finnish and the Chinese, it is the organizational positioning of the interacting sides that explains the situation better. For instance, several of the interviewees were Chinese nationals working for the Finnish delegates. The participants, irrespective of their nationalities, accept the focus on cultural differences as the whole set-up of the investment facilitation initiatives.

The study also provides an interesting Chinese-oriented viewpoint of differences between the groups involved in investment attraction. The study suggests that while Chinese government officials hold to traditional Chinese values still, Chinese venture capitalists accommodate global trends. Chinese venture capitalists have passed through a dynamic, multidimensional, and interdependent cross cultural adaptation process and have an emergent cultural identity (Kim 1995). They have often studied abroad, speak English fluently, and have immersed themselves in materialism (Chuang 2004:60). Therefore, in some ways at least, they appear easier for the Finns to work with.

There were also deviations from the discursive positioning of adjustment. Occasionally, the Finnish delegates spoke of maintaining their way of doing things, for instance, keeping the Finnish work-time culture (not working evenings or weekends), speaking with directness when their straightforward talk was accepted by the Chinese, or paying less attention to the hierarchy when the Chinese group encountered was less traditional, such as venture capitalists. Positioning may involve shifts in power, shifts in degrees of access, and offering a chance to choose between different lines of action (Davies and Harré 1990). This study demonstrates how distinct discourses can coexist, compete and create various versions of reality. It also shows that communication is strategic and influenced by power relations. Due to data collection limitations in Finland, the voice of Finnish participants is stronger, and there is a power imbalance in the representation, in spite of some participants being Chinese working for the Finnish side. The perceptions of the participants may be ethnocentric and their expressions can in themselves be seen as a part of power positioning.

The study offers a new contribution to the field of intercultural communication as an empirical study focused on aspects of power in intercultural communication. It takes departure in the concepts of positioning and narratives, which rarely occurs in the field of intercultural communication. The novelty and usefulness of the findings is the focus on how the aspect of power acts together with the narratives and stereotypes of China. The findings of the study suggest that partner will tend to have a motivation to adjust if there is a narrative of co-operation country being in a (growing) position of power and there is a potential of economic gain. Adjustments can be possibly derived from learning experiences in situational contexts as well as preconceptions and stereotypes about the other partner. However, the accommodation will usually last only up to a certain point. When it becomes “too much” or adjustment appears not as important, own power and communication or working style tends to be asserted.

Regarding the limitations of this research, it is a small-scale study predominantly based on interviews. However, the interviewees’ stories give insight about their momentary concerns and circumstances, revealing the every-day reality of people working in investment and co-operation facilitation from China to Finland. The views and perceptions of the Chinese regarding communication in the investment facilitation context was not the focus of this study, but would be equally interesting and important to consider in further research.

While the term ‘rising China’ implies a power relationship as if China, previously, has been something ‘less’, this study to some extent demonstrates the reversal of the traditional mindset of so-called Western colonial ideology when seeking business in China. The study also raises several questions on a wider scale. In regard to the dictum “when in Rome, do as Romans do,” could China and the Chinese become the new economic superpower? Will the “local moral order” globally become more and more “Chinese” and thus require subsequent positioning from others – not only in China in the role of expatriates, but also in their home country when dealing with China?

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II

CHINA-FINLAND CO-OPERATION, TRADE AND INVEST- MENT: IN SEARCH OF COMMON GROUND

by

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China-Finland Co-operation, Trade, and Investment: In Search of Common Ground

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Abstract: The importance of co-operation with China has been growing in Finland and the rest of Europe in view of the rising global economic and political status of China and the interest in attracting Chinese investments. In Finland, government agencies have been established for this purpose, and regional and local governments are also actively involved. Delegation visits between China and Finland have been intensively on-going for some years, but matching interests and finding common ground for co-operation, trade and investment often still proves to be a challenging task.

Based on interviews with Finnish representatives and on observing delegation visits, this paper explores the difficulties that Finns report to be having in moving past a general level of interest by the Chinese in Finland and presents suggested solutions.

Speech codes theory by Philipsen (1997) and the notion of common ground by Stalnaker (1999) form the theoretical basis of this paper. The results illustrate how a lack of serious interest, vague or restrictive government regulations, the long time to build relationships, and the involvement of intermediaries are seen by interviewees as factors contributing to talks often remaining at a general level. Suggested strategies to create more possibilities for finding common ground and for making co-operation talks more specific include presenting areas of expertise in Finland and matching those with Chinese needs, utilizing the pragmatism that is seen to be characteristic of both cultures, and investing in building necessary connections and relationships.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Importance of the Study

The importance of co-operation with China has been growing in Finland and the rest of Europe lately because of the rising global economic and political status of China and the interest in attracting Chinese investments. Finland and the Baltic Sea Region as a whole have not been a major destination for Chinese investments to date. However, Chinese interest in the region has increased in recent years, as has the awareness in Finland of the importance of China and the possibilities relating to Chinese investments (Kaartemo, 2007). In Finland, government agencies have been established for this purpose. Regional and local governments are also involved in the framework of town twinning and other activities. The Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a China Action Plan in 2010 that recognizes the growing role of China on the international scene and states priority areas for co-operation. Delegations visits from China to Finland and vice versa form an important part of trade and investment,

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and broader co-operation facilitation. These involve matchmaking events, meetings with officials, company visits, etc. While these mutual activities between China and Finland have been on-going for some years, matching interests and finding common ground is still considered to be challenging. Wang (2007), who has studied Sino-Finnish partnerships, considers that finding the right approach for the partnership strategy is not easy, and partnerships often dissolve before set goals are achieved. The motivation for co-operation is based on a country's own needs, interests, and development strategies, which can be difficult to match with those of the other side. This is a productive context for studying intercultural communication, because this kind of co-operation is still new in many ways. There is not much previous experience of the Chinese in Finland, and there is a lack of research on intercultural communication in this context. In addition, for a long time Europeans have headed to China as buyers, but nowadays the picture is more complicated and the roles are often reversed. Both attracting Chinese investment and promoting Finnish products in the Chinese market involves the Finns taking the role of the seller. In practice, product sale and investment attraction are often connected, as investments are also raised to develop the products. In particular local governments are often involved in various co-operation activities, which cannot be separated from each other.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyze the perspective of Finnish negotiators concerning the challenge of finding common ground with Chinese co-operation partners as well as their suggested communication strategies for this challenge. The purpose is also to reveal the fascinating every-day reality of people working on investment, co-operation, and trade facilitation between China and Finland. The study contributes new empirical data with conceptual importance to ethnographic research in multicultural workplaces. While the phenomenon of rising China persists, the paper provides insights into a newly developing context of intercultural communication that, at the same time, has important similarities to other Chinese co-operation, trade, and investment facilitation initiatives elsewhere in the world. The Finnish perspective provided in this paper may show some similarities to those of other small nations wanting to co-operate with China. It may also be relevant to interested Chinese counterparts who want to achieve a better understanding of this context.

1.2 Previous Research

There is a considerable amount of previous research on the traditional Chinese communication style in working life and also on other factors influencing business

interaction. In exploring the influence of Confucian values on Chinese working life, Ock Yum identifies one of the characteristic traits in Chinese working life as indirect communication, which “helps to prevent the embarrassment of rejection by the other person or disagreement among partners, leaving the relationship and each other’s ‘face’ intact” (Ock Yum, 1997: 85). Another important aspect is that of the long time required to build relationships before engaging in business, which can be related to the distinction between the in-group and the out-group in Confucian societies. Confucian principles involve the need to be affiliated and identified with comparatively small, tightly knit groups of people over long periods of time. An intermediary is needed to bridge the in-group and out-group members and to initiate a new relationship. The importance of taking time to build a personal relationship can also be explained by process, not outcome, oriented communication (Ock Yum, 1997). Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) further reflect on the impact of indigenous Confucian cultural traditions on the Chinese communication style, listing five distinctive characteristics: 1) implicit communication (*hanxu*), 2) listening-centred communication (*tinghua*), 3) polite communication (*keqi*), 4) insider-communication (*zijiren*), and 5) face-directed communication (*mianzi*). This research has had wide influence in management and communication literature.

However, as argued by Fang and Faure (2011), opposite Chinese communication behavior is equally evident in Chinese society given different situations, contexts and times. The interaction between traditional Chinese values, modernization and the Western influence tends to create cultural expressions that may be quite surprising and unexpected. For instance, as a result of China’s market-oriented economic development, there has been a rise in the *tinghua* (not listening, not obeying) attitude. In addition, Jameson (2007) considers that as growing up in a country affects an individual’s values, beliefs and behavior, so acculturation into a particular field or profession, for instance, does too. Intercultural conflicts may occur also between or within businesses in a single country, while international affiliates may share aspects of common culture (Louhiala-Salminen, 1997). When studying a culture, it is important to avoid generalizations, since

we are both yin and yang, feminine and masculine, long-term and short-term, individualistic and collectivistic, monochronic and polychronic, and high-context and low-context, depending on situation, context, and time (Fang, 2005-2006: 77).

Cultures and codes are essential when attempting to understand individual lives and societies,

but it is important to remember that they are dynamic resources used by social actors (Philipsen, Coutu & Covarrubias, 2005).

“Managing Rapport in Intercultural Business Interactions: a Comparison of Two Chinese – British Welcome Meetings” (Spencer-Oatey, Xing 2003) is a study revealing how the same kind of meetings can be perceived very differently by the Chinese and British and what cultural beliefs dictate that perception. For instance, the second meeting during which the research took place, was perceived positively by the British, but caused much dissatisfaction among the Chinese. Some reasons for the dissatisfaction were inappropriate seating arrangements and perceived lack of gratitude for Chinese contracts, factors that the British were not aware of. The rumors heard before about the British company strongly influenced the expectations of the Chinese. Thus, the study illustrates how certain preconceptions that are not directly communicated to the other side can influence the building of common ground and the success of meetings.

To sum up, studies to date have mainly outlined the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, revealing how Chinese traditional values affect business interactions. However, some studies also reveal differences across various professional groups, the way in which the forces of modernization change some traditional values, and the influence of various preconceptions.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1997), which addresses the relationship between communication and culture, has guided this study. Speech codes are systems of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises and rules pertaining to communicative conduct. Three propositions of the speech codes theory that are most relevant for this study will be used as a framework for analyzing the results. Data interpretation will focus on the fourth proposition of the theory, which states that the interacting sides tend to interpret communicative conduct according to practices in their own culture. Also proposition six of the theory will be used, which states that speech codes frame responses according to ways accepted in society (Philipsen, Coutu & Covarrubias, 2005). These two propositions serve as the starting point of the study, accounting for the possible influence of culture on communication. They will also be referred to when describing how aspects of traditional culture have influence on business interactions in the context studied. To account for the variety of the possible communicative responses, the second proposition will also be used,

which states that any speech community uses multiple speech codes. Different codes related to communicative conduct, or at least traces of them can be found coexisting in the same life-world (Philipsen et al., 2005).

Addressing the criticism that speech codes theory treats culture as an overly deterministic or static entity (Griffin, 2003), the author of the theory has recognized that, at times, people not only follow, but also abandon their cultures (Philipsen, 1997). There is a strong statement in the theory about the force of the codes in shaping communicative conduct, but culture is not seen as simplistically deterministic. For instance, the second proposition of the theory states that any speech community uses multiple speech codes. Thus, the speech codes of the local culture do not appear in isolation from other speech codes, but all of them are mixed together (Philipsen et al., 2005). Thus, referring to the section on previous research, business interaction cannot be viewed at the level of national culture differences alone; there may be other factors, such as the influence of modernization, the affect of the professional group to which one belongs, preconceptions about the situation, etc.

The concept of common ground will be used repeatedly in this paper. In a pragmatic sense, common ground can be understood as mutual interest in a matter that enables parties to move forward with some common goals in co-operation, trade or investment. Garber (2006) sees finding common ground as one aspect of collaborative management, as organizations everywhere are challenged to work more closely with one another. Gray (1989) states that collaboration is necessary for finding common ground, defining the following key steps: exploring how to get parties together to define the problem, establishing an agenda, and implementing a solution. In an experiment by Horton and Keysar (1996), speakers described objects for listeners in a modified version of the referential communication task. While descriptions under no time constraints appeared to incorporate common ground with the listener, common ground was not used when the speakers were under time pressure. This suggests that finding common ground takes time. The concept of common ground will also be used regarding communication – achieving enough joint understanding about a matter that makes it possible to proceed with the communication and with working together. Stalnaker (1999) considers that common ground involves intuitions about what is not said, but merely presupposed and plays an important role in the communication process. One side may take some common ground for granted while the opposite side may not share it. Not everyone may know or believe the same things, and this is especially so for people with very different cultural backgrounds (Korta & Perry, 2011).

1.4 Data and Methodology

The main methodological approach of the study was interviewing representatives of the Finnish side who work on Chinese investment, co-operation and trade facilitation at state, regional or local level. Some participant observation in meetings was also conducted to give access to naturally occurring intercultural communication, and to provide a fuller sense of the context. Nine interviews were carried out in Helsinki, Turku and Lahti (Finland) in autumn 2013, and two observation projects were undertaken for six days in total during a Chinese delegation visit from Tianjin to Turku (October 2013) and during a Finnish delegation visit from Oulu to Suzhou in China (May 2014). Observation helped to identify possible themes prior to the interviews and in the data analysis. Field notes were taken during the meetings organized for visiting delegations, which were later developed into more detailed accounts based on memory (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

This paper is predominantly based on the nine interviews carried out in the autumn of 2013. The interviewees' ages were from the mid-20s to the 60s. Four were representatives of local or regional governments, three were team members of a state investment attraction agency, and two were interpreters working for the Finnish side. The length of experience the Finns had in Chinese co-operation ranged from four to 20 years. Two Finns also had experience of living and working in China, one for five years and the other for six years. The Chinese interviewees had lived in Finland for between five and 20 years. All had some education in Finland, and had worked for Finnish-Chinese co-operation ventures for around two years. Among the interviewees there was a person of Japanese origin who had worked for co-operation with China in Finland for five years. Abiding by the Guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012), the interviewees' personal information is kept to a minimum and they were coded as IV1-9. Some interviewee basic data is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Interviewee codes and basic data.

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

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, broadly addressing the experiences of working with the Chinese. Interviews were undertaken with the purpose of inductively finding out the most relevant themes regarding communication in this setting and encouraging the interviewees to offer their own definitions of particular activities (Briggs, 1986; Silverman, 2006). The interviewees were also asked about how they developed meaning for their activities and problems. The interviews were carried out in English, and the interview quotations used in this paper are direct citations except in cases where the text had to be corrected for the sake of comprehension. Five interviews were undertaken in interviewees' workplaces, two in the cafeteria, and the remaining two by Skype.

Regarding the relatively small size of the sample, the research project addresses the dynamic qualities of a situation and thus the issue of sample size and representativeness does not much affect the project's basic logic. In a qualitative framework, research based on interviews seeks to show meanings; therefore a small number of cases facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents and inquiry in naturalistic settings (Crouch, 2006). The research material was sorted according to the cultural categories used by participants and how these are used in concrete activities. The findings presented in this paper include reflections on the differences within these categories, attributes associated with them, and the dimensions of contrast discovered within each category (Spradley, 1980). Close

reading of the material showed some striking moments of interaction and some recurrent patterns, which formed a corpus of data under several main themes (Nikander, 2008). Combining the analysis of interview and observation data, a detailed description of the intercultural communication dynamics in the given context has allowed for several relevant topics to be identified. The challenge with the general level of Chinese interest when trying to find common ground in co-operation and possible solutions to that emerged as common subthemes in the interviewee's answers. Some other main topics in the data which are not the focus of this paper were the power relations between the Chinese and Finnish sides, varieties of positioning depending on whether one was in the role of guest or host, and the role of the English language as a communication tool. At times people's answers in interviews do "not have a stable relationship to how they behave in naturally occurring situations" (Silverman, 2006: 39), but their stories do give insight into their momentary concerns and circumstances.

2. Challenges in Search of Common Ground

2.1 Lack of Serious Interest in Finland by the Chinese

Interviewees spoke of several obstacles in finding common ground, and lack of serious interest in Finland by the Chinese emerged as one of the most important. Turning to the reasons why talks are general and actual co-operation is difficult to realize, several interviewees said that, in their experience, sometimes the visiting Chinese only wanted to get an impression of Finland and they did not think of it as a country to do important business with:

Many small groups visit, for example, our university of applied sciences, and it's just a friendly visit. We have many such delegations visiting Finland who just want to learn, want to get an average opinion of Finland. I guess when Chinese companies go abroad they are looking for the "big fish". There are not many investments, and I guess there is a problem of scale. (IV6)

They may consider that the visit is not serious, but like a leisure trip. Then they plan a two-hour official visit, because they don't plan to have real co-operation. I think they see visiting us as a half-relaxed trip for recreation, because Finland is not important for business in the minds of people. (IV2)

Lack of serious interest may not be communicated directly to the Finnish side, according to IV3: "It is quite difficult to understand when the Chinese are really interested and when they are not." The Chinese interest in Finland has reduced recently, according to IV3:

What has changed is that there are not many delegations any more. Something happened two or three years ago, maybe the Chinese have seen enough of what we have and they don't send so many delegations to our country anymore, and the situation is the same in Sweden and Estonia.

Lack of serious consideration at times can also manifest as varying interest regarding meeting:

When a Finnish person says – “hey, let's meet at this place at this time,” then the Finn will be there at that time. In the case of the Chinese, this - “hey, let's meet up!” - is more like - “Hello! Bye bye! Have a nice day!” (...) One time we had a delegation coming at lunchtime. Then five minutes before three o'clock, they said they were not coming! And I was in and out of this place preparing rooms, tables, coffee and tea. (IV7)

To sum up, the Finnish interviewees mainly attributed the lack of serious interest by the Chinese partners to Finland being a comparatively small, marginal country which, on average, the Chinese are not yet familiar with. The interviewees said that while the Finnish side normally takes the visits and meetings seriously, at times, the Chinese interest is seen as superficial. The indirect communication reportedly also makes it difficult to understand when the Chinese are really interested and when they are not, which they do not usually reveal directly. The interviewees also saw the varying interest in visiting and meeting as a sign of lack of serious consideration. The interviewees' statements imply that the starting point for the Finnish side is based on their own cultural expectations - if the Chinese have come, they want actual co-operation, or at least will state their intentions in a direct way. However, this may not always be the case.

2.2 Restrictive Regulations or Too General Co-operation Guidelines by Chinese

Another major factor contributing to the difficulties in finding common ground in co-operation and investment that the interviewees spoke of is related to the restrictive or too general co-operation guidelines of the Chinese government:

For Chinese small or even medium sized companies, it's really difficult to start doing business abroad without the acceptance of the government and even more difficult for them to invest their money abroad without the government's permission. It's much easier to get state-owned companies to invest abroad; very few private companies invest abroad. (IV3)

It is very military-like in China. If someone makes a decision at the top, it will happen, whereas in Finland the approach is more grass roots, like small soldiers doing this or that. (IV7)

In cases where the government supports the co-operation, such as town twinning, it nevertheless seems difficult to achieve “real” co-operation. The interviewees said that one reason for this is that the Chinese officials coming to Finland may only have some general guidelines of co-operation from their central government, so they may not be sure about what concrete actions to take:

I hear between the lines that they don’t really know what they have to do. The paper that they gave, maybe it was just a bad translation or a draft, but it was very general. I just get the feeling they don’t really have a concrete plan to implement. (IV1)

IV6 agreed that the areas included in the co-operation memorandum with the twinning city in China were very broad: “It involves almost anything – from science to culture to business, but this is to show that there’s a green light – yes, we are willing to co-operate.”

To sum up, the interviewees described how co-operation areas could remain rather vague and general, because at times the Chinese government had not formulated them clearly enough, and there were also regulations that complicate private overseas investments from China.

The interviewees related the lack of clarity regarding Chinese intentions, to some degree at least, to the cultural concept of indirectness. IV4 said: “I think maybe the Chinese talk at a very general level; that they are very careful about the words that they speak, but Finns are more straightforward, I think.” In the experience of IV7, “the communication – just like in the textbooks – is very indirect, and the cultural cues, facial expressions and so on are very different.” Indirectness can be seen as an obstacle in creating common ground, because presuppositions are not communicated and therefore it is more difficult to establish if there is common understanding on the matter or not.

2.3 The Time Necessary to Build Relationships with the Chinese

The interviewees also spoke of needing a long time to build relationships when trying to co-operate with the Chinese. Their accounts suggest that this may result in a lack of specificity in co-operation talks, especially in the early stages:

The Chinese would like to build the relationship over a longer time, go to dinners, and find a way to friendship and a relationship, and only after that start to talk openly about anything. We in Finland don't bother so much about extra details; we just want to go directly to discussions. (IV8)

However, there may also be differences in the time devoted to building relationships depending on the type of group involved on the Chinese side:

With venture capitalists, discussions are very to the point. They have strict, very tight schedules which are always running very smoothly. They want to meet the investment targets, and that's it. Maybe the private sector is more to the point and business-like, but with the government it is a little bit trickier. (IV8)

Finding the right kind of connections can also be complicated and take time, especially in trade:

We know that the product is very good, maybe the best, and that the price is competitive. Contacts have been made, but we don't actually know anybody there! These problems may even affect the Chinese person who knows you and your product and is interested in bringing it to China. This is the most common difficulty and I have come across it many times. (IV5)

Matchmaking events are sometimes organized as one of the co-operation, trade and facilitation activities to provide opportunities to make connections:

Good matchmaking - finding the company in China that needs the service or product from Finland, the right contact person, to sit down, and discuss with - is quite hard. On the Finnish side, where there is a company, there is a person who has the right to start negotiations, or can say what they can sell or buy. But on the Chinese side, there is often some kind of agent who is ready to find contacts for you. (IV6)

Thus, Finnish representatives see the relatively long time that it takes to build a relationship as one reason why it can be difficult to find common ground and why, at times, co-operation talks remain at a general level. Several factors are involved, such as the Chinese preference of spending more time getting to know each other before undertaking concrete tasks, the difficulty of finding the right people to contact, and the involvement of intermediaries. However, this aspect is not equally strong in all contexts and among all groups. For instance

groups such as venture capitalists tend to be more task-oriented and take less time to build relationships.

To sum up, based on an empirical study using both interviews and observations, the main findings indicate that a major challenge in finding common ground in Chinese-Finnish co-operation is related to persistent difficulties in moving past the general level of talks with the Chinese. This section considered three main obstacles in finding common ground with Chinese partners from the perspective of people working on co-operation in Finland: lack of serious interest, restrictive or vague government regulations, and the time necessary to build relationships with the Chinese. All of these are reflected in the communications in one way or another and occasionally interviewees related them to the cultural concept of indirectness.

In the following chapter, the possibilities of dealing with these challenges and extending the common ground will be considered, as suggested by interviewees.

3. Possibilities for Finding Common Ground

3.1 Presenting Areas of Own Expertise and Matching Them with Chinese Needs

To overcome the lack of interest and to move beyond general level talks, the interviewees suggested that presenting areas of Finnish strengths and expertise is important, as well as the ability to match these with Chinese needs:

Perhaps we can succeed if we find good, small niches for the businesses, like in biotechnology, there might be something. But you just don't come and invest in biotech, but to invest in something very special, something very specialized. (IV6)

I have been working with Finnish high tech companies for 15 years, and now I know a little bit about China, what they are looking for, and how to match these – a very small country with excellent technology, but no scalability with a big country with lots of scalability and need. (IV8)

Not necessarily any specific field, but to match the interests of both sides is more the key rather than promoting any specific field of business. (IV1)

An example of how to deal with vague suggestions based on general directions from the Chinese government can be seen from observing the delegation visit from Tianjin to Turku. During the visit, the leader of the Chinese delegation referred to their areas of interest using non-specific phrases such as “resource integration,” “platform establishment” and “technology program.” In response to a Finnish request for clarification of the “technology program,” the Chinese response was that the Mayor of Tianjin had issued regulations for the support and growth of 40,000 small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) including start-ups.

The Finnish response was a highly detailed presentation enumerating the specific expert business fields in the Turku region, which included a wide range of industries and services such as biotechnology, life sciences, environment, health, maritime (arctic vessels), functional food and food safety, pedagogic and teacher training, business skills and project management, and quality assurance. The Chinese responded that large markets for all these fields exist in both Tianjin and the whole of China. Thus, the Finnish strategy of dealing with the situation proactively, asking direct questions and giving specific information was a way to make the possible co-operation direction more specific.

To sum up, the interviewees' opinion was that presenting the areas of expertise in Finland and then being able to match those with Chinese needs would help to overcome lack of serious interest by the Chinese and help to specify co-operation plans. Regarding communication, this strategy could be seen as an effort to frame Chinese responses according to Finnish expectations, facilitating more specific input from them.

3.2 Utilizing the Common Characteristic of Pragmatic Working Cultures

If Chinese interest was sparked after the presentation about the areas of expertise and they saw where it matched their needs, then, as observed by the study participants, they are also quite practical people who are interested in making things happen. There may be some common cultural traits with the Chinese that could help to extend the common ground. One of the things mentioned repeatedly by the interviewees as a unifying factor was the pragmatism and practicality characteristic of both the Finnish and Chinese working cultures:

I just feel that result-orientation combines both cultures. The Chinese are hard-working business people. In the same way, if the Finns have something they want to achieve, they really work for that. (IV8)

I think both cultures are 'doers', making things happen, results and result-orientation drives both of these cultures. I mean, somehow Chinese culture, the way China works, is very effective at the moment. (IV7)

I guess as we see in the Chinese economy, they want to get things moving, and then you can get results, which is money or doing something. (IV6)

IV1 has experienced that the practical gain can be a strong motivator for the Chinese: "The Chinese are very pragmatic people, so if they are interested in one of our companies, things start to happen very, very quickly."

To conclude, the study participants consider that once the attention of the Chinese is caught, the practicality and pragmatism of both the Finnish and Chinese working cultures is the resource to build on to make things happen and to produce real results. This can be seen as an effort to utilize the existing common ground between the parties, which is possible when mutual interest in the matter has been achieved. Thus, showing to the Chinese partners the practical gain for them from certain investment targets, products, or co-operation areas can accelerate the process of finding common ground.

The pragmatism of both the Chinese and Finnish working cultures has also been recognized in the literature. Ock Yum (1997) considers that Confucianism is a pragmatic and present-oriented philosophy that focuses on life at present and on serving men. Isotalus (2006) suggests that achieving economic success is a strong motivator for Finns, so that, for instance, they tend to take care of relationships when they are important for business, such as customer relationships. The Finnish working culture can be related to the broader construct of the Protestant work ethic that has been discussed in the literature (Dose, 1997). The pragmatism and mutual interest in the results is thus something that “clicks” between Chinese and Finnish working cultures.

3.3 Patience and Investment in Building Relationships with the Chinese

With respect to the long time to build relationships and finding the right people to co-operate with, the solution suggested by the interviewees was to create more possibilities to meet on a professional level, between experts and face-to-face, as well as accepting that time investment and patience are needed.

Comparing the different levels at which the contacts can be made, company-to-company and professional contacts can be much more effective, according to the observations of several interviewees:

If the company finally finds somebody, then maybe in one or two weeks it gets much more information than we can have – of course! That is because the company always has interest in their point of view, and we are outsiders. (IV5)

We need to go to the professional level so that the professionals meet and decide on co-operation. We need to have the right partners on both sides, not generally, but to get the experts to talk to each other. (IV6)

Most of the time we talk directly with the companies, one of the parties is a Finn who helps the customers to make good decisions and achieve their aims. This

involves meetings, e-mails, and discussions with the customer. We try to minimize the bureaucracy and hierarchy. (IV9)

Study participants spoke of creating more possibilities to meet face-to-face, thus increasing the chances of finding the right contacts and building successful partnerships:

You need more and more contacts, more and more places for people to meet and get to know each other. They need to find and establish the connections that they really can rely on – on both sides, I guess. (IV6)

You must go there, feel it, I tell companies that you must go. I gave a lecture the day before yesterday, and I said that you have to go to China and you have to meet the people all the time. (IV5)

We are only one country, so maybe to keep up the communication and the closeness with the customers I hope that there will be more and more Chinese organizations, science parks, investors and companies here in the Nordic countries. It's necessary to make this interaction happen. (IV8)

Building relationships with the Chinese takes patience and the acceptance that the process is going to take time, as most participants in the study recognized:

One thing is that we need a lot of time, and I don't think we can change that; just accept that the process takes time. You need to build a relationship and that is the normal way of doing business in China, so nothing happens immediately. Either you already have a relationship and you build a business on top of that, or you need to build a relationship and then simultaneously you do business while you are in a relationship. (IV9)

There are a lot of challenges. The main thing is to achieve some concrete results, to complete some business to business co-operation...but it takes time. (IV1)

It certainly takes many years before you get any profit from China, but yes it is a big market and you should really focus on it. You just can't be half-hearted and just see if it works or not in China, you have to be committed, and that must be a part of your strategy. (IV6)

Thus, working directly at the business-to-business level and having more face-to-face meetings both in China and Finland may make the relationship building process more effective and speedy; but at the same time, patience is required and the acceptance that relationship building takes time. The proposed Finnish strategy to extend the common ground involves the acceptance and accommodation of the longer time needed to build connections

and relationships. So, at least two coexisting speech codes could be observed in this situation – using accelerated means to meet in order to speed up the process, but also accepting the need for time when building relationships with the Chinese.

4. Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

This paper looked at the possible challenges and opportunities in search of common ground in co-operation, trade, and investment between China and Finland from the viewpoint of people working on these matters on the Finnish side. The people interviewed felt that the potential possibilities with China are not being fully exploited, and related this to a lack of “serious” interest from the Chinese side, restrictive regulations or vague co-operation formulations plans, and the long time needed to build relationships. The difficulties in moving past a general level of interest from the Chinese were a cause of frustration to the Finnish side, and the slow rate of outcomes was not what they expected. It can be concluded that the starting point for the Finnish side was based on their own cultural assumptions - if the Chinese have come, they want real co-operation, they will discuss in a straightforward way and specifically with the people directly responsible for the matter. This will then lead to concrete actions – actual co-operation, sales, investment, and all of that as quickly and efficiently as possible. Proposition four of the Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, Coutu & Covarrubias, 2005) states that the interacting sides tend to interpret communicative conduct according to the practices in their own culture. For example, on a co-operation visit, Finns may presuppose that the Chinese are interested in actual, concrete and efficiently quick co-operation, which may indeed be the case. However, sometimes this may not be the case, or it is simply not possible due to some cultural or organizational considerations by the Chinese partners. The interviewees considered that it appears that occasionally the Finnish side takes the common ground of interest in real co-operation for granted, when it turns out that the Chinese only wanted to gain a general impression of Finland. Indirectness is partly accommodated, attempting to “read” from non-verbal cues when the Chinese are not interested, but there are also efforts to extend the common ground by encouraging the Chinese to be more direct, for instance about co-operation areas. To conclude, true co-operation requires mutual interest and its communication to the other partner. However, based on the data it is possible to see how one can make someone interested once interaction starts. Apparently, lack of interest is not something fixed; rather it is a kind of starting point, not giving something serious consideration at first. Preconceptions change in the process of visiting and interaction.

There could be a number of factors contributing to the general level of Chinese interest regarding co-operation and the fact that co-operation talks often remain on a superficial level. Some study participants explained that with indirectness, the concept of traditional Chinese culture. They believed this aspect is involved in not clearly communicating a lack of serious interest and in drafting too vague co-operation plans. In addition, it could be that the Confucian in-group and out-group distinction plays a role concerning the need for more time to build relationships (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Ock Yum, 1997). It appears that in some groups, such as government and local government officials in particular, the traditional Chinese values still seem to be strong, and these may be involved to some degree when intentions are not clearly communicated and when relationship building comes before the task. However, to verify these claims, more data is necessary, including interviewing Chinese visitors, as similar behaviors may also appear in contexts where a Confucian background is not a factor. The questions related to direct and indirect communication are complex and contextually bound. The interviewees said that Chinese venture capitalists tend to be more task-oriented and direct, which turns the attention to differences between various professional groups within one nation and the possible existence of multiple speech codes in the same society.

The Finnish side cannot directly influence the factors contributing to the general level of Chinese interest, but they shared efforts to deal with this by making the co-operation talks more specific. In particular, to be considered more seriously for actual co-operation, the interviewees said that it was helpful to present the areas of strength in Finland and match them with Chinese needs. The interviewees have observed that the Chinese are pragmatic people, and if they see actual gain, things will start to happen. When common areas of interest are identified, it is possible to utilize some pre-existing common ground between parties, which can be, for example, the practicality and pragmatism characteristics of both the Finnish and Chinese working cultures. At least in part, the historical origins of working cultures can be traced back to the Confucian heritage in the case of China, and the Protestant work ethic in the case of Finland. While the origins of working cultures are different, it appears that there are similarities, which can be a joint speech code between parties. This finding could have practical relevance for business actors and would be worth further investigation for practical applications.

Regarding the long time required to build relationships with the Chinese, the Finnish approach to this is strategic, in part – more visits to China, more Chinese institutions in

Finland, and moving more readily to the business-to-business or professional level – all of these might help to speed up the process. However, acceptance of the need to invest time and effort in building relationships was also communicated, suggesting that some adaptation is also necessary to extend the common ground and to be able to work with China and the Chinese. Proposition six of the speech codes theory suggests that speech codes frame responses according to ways that are accepted in society. There is proof that people experience social pressure to conform their behavior to the social codes in their society (Philipsen, Coutu & Covarrubias, 2005). People working for the Finnish side are facing the double pressure to accommodate the needs of their own culture in terms of directness, effectiveness and the results expected from them, but at the same time, to some degree at least, to adjust to the Chinese way of doing things, which may require patience and time.

The proposed strategy of the Finnish representatives to extend the common ground contains elements of pressure, utilizing existing common ground, and adjustment to the Chinese side. It can be claimed from the results of this study that the most effective way to increase the common ground involves a combination of finding and utilizing the existing common ground, exerting pressure on the other side to accept your way to some degree, and adapting part of the other side's way as your own. Interestingly, the Finnish strategy towards indirectness by the Chinese is to predominantly pressure the other party to be more direct, which can be attempted, for example, by offering co-operation areas and clarifying general terms. However, it appears that the main strategy chosen for building relationships is adaptation and acceptance, realizing this task takes time and requires patience. Several questions about building relationships can be raised for consideration in future studies. All relationships take time to build, but where can this time be found? How "deep" should the relationship be if the goal is simple business interaction?

Concerning the limitations of this study, it is a small-scale study predominantly based on interviews. At times, the interviewees' answers do not "have a stable relationship to how they behave in naturally occurring situations" (Silverman, 2006: 39). However, as the aim of the study was get to know the meanings that Finns attribute to their co-operation with the Chinese, the results certainly have provided relevant information on their perceptions. The purpose of this paper was not to generalize, but to reveal the fascinating every-day reality of people working on co-operation, trade and investment facilitation between China and Finland.

The results of this study may be relevant on a wider scale, as other small countries may face similar challenges in different contexts when trying to co-operate with the Chinese. The

views and perceptions of the visiting Chinese regarding co-operation development were not the focus of this study, but they would be equally interesting and important to consider in further research.

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III

CHINESE 'ENORMOUS HOSPITALITY' VERSUS FINNISH 'MEETING AMONG FRIENDS:' GUEST-HOST POSITIONING IN CHINA FINLAND DELEGATION VISITS

by

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Chinese ‘Enormous Hospitality’ Versus Finnish ‘Meeting Among Friends’: Guest-Host Positioning in China Finland Delegation Visits

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Abstract The importance of co-operation with China has been growing in Finland lately in view of interest to attract Chinese investments and the increasing importance of China on a global scale. Finland has established governmental agencies to aid Chinese investment and ensured the co-operation of regional and local governments in the framework activities, such as town twinning. An important part of investment facilitation and wider co-operation comprises delegation visits by both interested nations to the other country. These involve enterprise interest match-making events, meetings with officials, company visits, etc. Based on interview and observation data, this paper elaborates on how the phenomena related to power, positioning, and accommodation between Finnish and Chinese side are manifested during delegation visits. This study was guided by the Positioning Theory by Davies and Harré (J Theory Social Behav 21:1–18, 1991) which involves the need to attend to local moral orders and centers on the view that local distribution of rights and duties determine different kinds of acts and the way episodes unfold. As potential investors, recently Chinese partners yield a different kind of power, which also affects communication between sides. However, in some contexts the discourse of China as a developing country is present as well. Local hosting traditions and being in a role of a guest or host adds some additional variety and layering to communication dynamics. The presence of various discursive positioning elements is analyzed in such aspects as preconceived attitudes, initial visiting impressions, self-presentation, reception style, and the provision of food.

Keywords China · Finland · Guest · Host · Positioning · Power · Communication

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145

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Introduction

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

There is considerable research and literature concerning Chinese-American and Chinese-British negotiation (Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2003). Although Finnish—Chinese partnerships have also been addressed in previous research, for instance, by Wang (2007), there is lack of research focusing on power aspects of communication in this context, especially regarding newly emerging dynamics of investment attraction. The case of Finland can offer interesting and different repercussions when compared to bigger industrialized countries of Europe.

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

Theoretical Framework

This study has been guided by Positioning Theory by Davies and Harré (1991) that will be used for exploring power aspects in communication between Chinese and Finnish representatives. The Positioning Theory involves the possibility of the actor

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

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

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

Methodology and Materials

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

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

Table 1 Interview codes and basic data

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

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

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

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

Regarding observation, field notes were taken during meetings organized for visiting delegations, which were later developed into more detailed accounts based on memory (Emerson et al. 1995). The delegation visit from Tianjin to Turku was in the framework of town twinning and involved meetings at a local university and with the local government. The delegation visit from Oulu to Suzhou was with a

purpose to promote a Finnish company in China and involved meetings with local education institutions, local government, and a business consultant.

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

Big Superpower Versus a Small Country

According to interviewees and observation data, one of the positioning narratives between the Chinese and Finnish representatives when visiting each other is that of China as a big superpower in relation to which Finland is comparatively small and in a way, less significant country. In the setting of Finns visiting China, several interviewees recognized that when being in China, they or their Finnish counterparts were in a new way faced with the fact that China is a large country with overwhelming speed of development. Reflecting on her visiting experience in China, IV1 said:

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

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

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

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

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

So in China, if they know what Finland is, then they know that it is far away in the North and it is small.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to IV2, “from the government side, they usually want to know the sizes of organizations, and after they compared with the Finnish side they are very proud of their numbers.” When visiting Finland, the size comparison can also be communicated through jokes: “They make jokes on size of their organizations, and the size of China” (IV6). Sometimes Finns may be aware of this and try to make

justification for small numbers. For instance, during the observation activity of Chinese delegation in Finland, the local host was showing the testing site at the university. Before going, he warned Chinese not to be surprised that there are not many people today in the site, because it is a holiday week.

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

Advanced Developed Country Versus Developing Country

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To summarize, based on the data of this study the discourse of China as a developing country is still present when Finns visit China, especially for the first timers for whom this impression has remained from older days and has not been properly updated. It is also possible that some Finns initially hold on to the remains of Western colonial ideology when getting involved with China. However, that may change during the visit. At the same time, some experiences of problems on spot may also reinforce the developing country image. The image of China as a developing country can manifest also when hosting Chinese guests in Finland as cautiousness and distrust. When the visiting Chinese get to know the Finnish innovations and hear of good policies and arrangements, the image of Finland as developed country is strengthened. In general, those Chinese coming to visit Finland normally know more about it and have possibility to learn more than some hosts randomly met in China. If the Chinese have come with the purpose of learning from Finnish experience, they also tend to look up to it as an advanced country.

'Overwhelming Hospitality' Versus 'Meeting Among Friends'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The scale is different. If an important (Chinese) delegation comes to Turku, we go to our City Hall. There we have beautiful rooms for a delegation of seven to eight persons and from our side, we also have seven or eight persons. It is a small nice meeting room and we sit down there with our mayor and discuss the agenda, and I we feel it is small and cozy. (IV6)

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

Provision of food for Chinese in Finland is one area presenting various options of approach. Several interviewees would bring Chinese to Finnish restaurants, feeling they should adjust and try something local:

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

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

The guys who don't speak any English and have not been abroad would like to have Chinese food. Also we give them to drink warm water, hot water is pretty enough to keep them satisfied. (IV3)

Due to the presence of Chinese population in Finland, the Chinese have the option of visiting Chinese restaurants and this preference was also sometimes catered to by the Finnish side. Several Chinese interviewees who have been involved in hosting

visits said that the Finnish food arrangements can seem too simple to the visiting Chinese or not suited to their taste, especially when Finnish or more generic Western food is being served:

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

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

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

Power of the Host Versus Awkwardness of the Visitor

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

It depends a lot on the Finnish counterpart, do they have some experience in China or not. With the very first timers you can expect certain kinds of situations in China; they don't have a clue how to address the attention of Chinese counterparts. (IV8)

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

Thus, experience can give more leverage with the other side, which is of course not only true in this context, but in various interactions in general. The gradual adjustment and learning process of Finnish representatives while visiting China IV8

characterized the following way: “They are always positively surprised, and then they learn, they learn how to communicate, every time—better and better.” Even if Finns learn about China ahead of the visit, there can be some unexpected situations, referring to observation experience:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To summarize, the first-time awkwardness and powerlessness in some ways were present in both sets of data—regarding Finns visiting China and also Chinese visiting Finland. With more experience, however, local norms and conditions tend to become more familiar, which allows one to start to feel more comfortable.

While there is no fixed local norm in most situations perhaps, and the hosts may feel awkward too, they are still more familiar with the places and arrange routines of the visit, which enhances the feeling of being in control and therefore having power.

Discussion

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

Thus, such discourses as rising superpower versus small country or advanced developed country versus developing country are the positioning resources that coexist and are both present, taking turns and getting manifested in different situations. It appears that when visiting Finland, Chinese are more faced with the reality that Finland is a developed country, and Finns in a new way face the reality that China is big, rising superpower when being in China. Thus, the location of the visit tends to shift the power dynamics more to the favor of the hosting country. It can also be claimed that it depends on the roles of the delegation members and purpose with which the delegation has come. If Chinese come as investors to Finland, the discourse of China as a rising superpower will be very present, and the same way also when Finns go to China with a purpose to sell their products and promote their companies. According to Isotalus (2006), a seller tends to be in a lower power position than the buyer. However, if the Chinese delegation has come with the purpose to learn from the Finnish side and are interested in technology transfer, the dominating discourse will be that of Finland as developed and China as developing country. In those cases, Finland as an advanced developed country is in the power position as a country people look at, having a well established influence. Occasionally, some problems evidenced on spot in China, such as pollution and the loss of historical heritage can strengthen the image of it as developing country in the eyes of Finnish representatives.

The role of guest or host adds more layering to the power dynamics between sides. According to Isotalus (2006), hosts tend to be in a more powerful position.

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

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

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

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

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

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

restaurant is a viable alternative alongside possibility of offering the food at a Finnish restaurant.

To conclude, the guest-host positioning is influenced by discourses of participants, the location of the visit, the traditional styles of hosting, and the roles participants take in a particular situation. According to Davies and Harré (1990, pp. 57–58),

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

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

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

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

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

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IV

THE SIMPLE AND THE COMPLEX NATURE OF HUMOR AND LAUGHTER IN CHINESE-FINNISH NEGOTIATIONS

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The Simple and the Complex Nature of Humor and Laughter in Finnish-Chinese Negotiations

SANTA STOPNIECE

This article explores humor and laughter as sites of the search for common ground and power positioning in the context of Finnish-Chinese co-operation. It is mainly based on data obtained by interviewing individuals who work in Finland either for local government or one of the state agencies responsible for attracting foreign investment. The study uses positioning theory by Harré (1991) and politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) when analyzing expressions of humor between the Finns and the Chinese. Humor and laughter are seen as integral to co-operation and at times can assist in finding common ground and improving the atmosphere at meetings. At the same time, perceived differences in the sense of humor and the complexities of Chinese 'face' may render the use of humor during negotiations difficult. According to the interviews, both nationalities make adjustments in their humorous expressions for the sake of co-operation. However, in some situations, power positioning and autonomy are also asserted.

ASIA IN FOCUS

Keywords: Humor, China, Finland, co-operation, common ground, power

The importance of co-operation with China has been increasing in Finland and other European countries in light of the growing importance of China and the interest in attracting Chinese investments. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland released the China Action Plan in 2010, which recognizes the role of China on the international scene and lists the priority areas for co-operation. Finland has established government agencies to facilitate Chinese investment in Finland and has also ensured the co-operation of regional and local governments in framework activities such as town twinning. Finns more frequently take the position of a seller by offering investment targets to Chinese or trying to gain a foothold in the huge Chinese market. An important part of investment facilitation and wider co-operation comprises reciprocal delegation visits by both nations.

Humor and laughter are integral parts of these visits, as is evident in the observations and interviews of this study. Humor can assist in building common ground, but at the same time it is complex to enact as a result of cultural differences in humor and possible sensitivities. In some ways, humor may also be a comparatively new field of exploration in international affairs for both the Finns and the Chinese. China was behind a “bamboo curtain” before it opened up to foreign investment in 1978. While the current President of China Xi Jinping smiles on official occasions, his predecessors hardly ever did. Finland, in turn, has been somewhat marginal in Europe, with more dynamic internationalization processes only happening in the last few decades. A common

stereotype is that Finns are not good at small talk, and humor is normally a part of small talk or talking in less formal circumstances. All these aspects make humor and laughter in Finnish-Chinese co-operation an interesting area to understand.

There are only a few studies focusing on national styles of humor in face-to-face interactions. Jokes can be seen on a continuum from almost universal to very culture-specific (Grindsted, 1997). Joking strategies appear to play a significant role in business negotiations, and such strategies relate to the structure and sequencing of talk in various ways in different languages and cultures (Harris & Barge-la-Chiappini, 1997). Pivoting on this research gap, the purpose of this paper is to explore and analyze humor and laughter as sites of a search for common ground and power positioning in Finnish-Chinese co-operation. This study approaches the topic mostly from the perspective of the Finnish side as they were more easily accessible to the author and most of the data was obtained in Finland. The author holds dual citizenship of Latvia and Finland. While my citizenship may involve a bias when approaching the subject, I have in-depth knowledge of China through having lived there for three years, being married to a Chinese national, and through having studied China related subjects since 2006.

Theoretical framework and method

The theoretical framework of the study is based on positioning theory by Harré (1991), which addresses power, positioning and accommodation in intercultural communication. An individual has nu-

merous choices about how to position themselves in response to an unfolding narrative and to change and adjust their position (Davies & Harré, 1990). In telling a joke, whether explicitly or implicitly, a speaker assigns parts and characters in the episodes described, both to themselves and to other people, including those taking part in the conversation. A person thus can be said to 'have been positioned' by another speaker (Davies & Harre, 1990). Humor is part of a power play, and positioning theory is a suitable resource for addressing humor in the dynamic context of co-operation with China, where power relations are being actively negotiated. Power is one of the functions of humor, the others being solidarity-based and psychological functions (Hay, 2000). Humor can be seen as a product of power relations and the contesting of these, thus humor analysis can be a tool that helps to discover organizational power relations (Dyer, 1991).

Politeness theory, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), will also be used when considering the aspect of 'face' in humor. According to this theory, humor involves accommodating two different 'face' needs – the need for autonomy and the need for affiliation, one of which may be stronger in a particular culture. The concept of common ground in the context of this paper is understood as one aspect of collaborative management when the co-operating sides are making an attempt to work closely with one another (Garber, 2006). Thus, two different 'face' needs impact the search for common ground; the 'face' of affiliation being in favour of it, and the 'face' of autonomy possibly working against it.

The main methodological tools used in the study were interviewing and participant observation. Observations were taken over six days during a Chinese delegation's visit from Tianjin, a major port city in northeastern China, to Turku, a city on the southwest coast of Finland, in October 2013, and also during a Finnish delegation's visit from Oulu, the most populous city in Northern Finland, to Suzhou, a city close to Shanghai, in May 2014.

I interviewed representatives of Finland who facilitated Chinese investment, co-operation and trade opportunities at the local and the state level. The representatives included five Finns, three Chinese and one Japanese person. The Chinese and Japanese participants had lived and worked in Finland for between 5 and 20 years. Four of the interviewees were representatives of local or regional government; three were team members of a state investment attraction agency, and two were Chinese interpreters working in Finland. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, broadly addressing the experiences of working with the Chinese.

The purpose of the interviews was to discover themes regarding communication in the setting of Chinese investment, co-operation and trade facilitation and to encourage interviewees to offer their own definitions of particular activities (Silverman, 2006; Briggs, 1986). Five interviews were held at the interviewees' workplaces, two in cafeterias and the remaining two over Skype. The interviews were conducted in English and recorded and transcribed. The interview quotations used in this paper are direct citations, and some have been modified for the sake of comprehension. The interviews were coded IV 1-9 according to the sequence in which they were conducted. Information about the interviewees is provided in Table 1. Some participant observation was also conducted in meetings to get access to naturally occurring intercultural communication, and to provide a fuller sense of the context. The nine interviews were conducted in the Finnish cities of Helsinki, Turku and Lahti in the autumn of 2013.

Silverman (2006, p. 39) notes that interview responses are not always consistently related with peoples' behavior in naturally occurring situations. However, their stories do provide insights about their momentary concerns and circumstances. Reflective use of interview materials has clear benefits in providing insight into topics and their characteristics in specific cultural contexts (Nikander, 2012). In a qualitative framework, research based on interviews seeks to manifest meanings; therefore, a small

INTERVIEWEE CODE	GENDER	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	WORKING TITLE
IV1	female	Japan	Business Development Officer
IV2	male	China	Interpreter
IV3	male	Finland	Development Manager
IV4	female	China	Interpreter
IV5	male	Finland	Senior Advisor
IV6	male	Finland	Head of International Affairs
IV7	male	China	Business Development Manager
IV8	female	Finland	Customer Operations Director
IV9	male	Finland	General Manager

Table 1. Interviewee codes and basic data

number of cases facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents and inquiry in naturalistic settings (Crouch, 2006).

During the analysis stage, the interview and observation data were systematized according to sub-themes and then combined for a thick description of the intercultural communication dynamics in the given context (Spradley, 1980; Geertz, 1973). One of the themes that emerged from the data was the role of humor and laughter in co-operation.

Humor and laughter as common ground

Humor is believed to have a connection to playing. It can be interpreted as training for the unexpected, placing oneself at risk of losing balance or dominance while learning to recover, and as catching one another off guard in ways that simulate risk and stimulate recovery (Boyd, 2004). Humor may be connected to seeking relief, ridding ourselves of accumulated nervous energy and a release of suppressed emotion (Porteus, 1988). The shift to a playful mode may imply a need for strengthening the interpersonal relationship between the speakers. Humor and laughter are universal; however, while laughter is clearly visible and audible, humor is more difficult to analyze. Laughter is not an exclusive reaction to humor, however it is an important and a convenient one to include in a definition of joking, which is in itself an important aspect of humor. In a conversational approach to joking, the utterance

counts as a joke if it is 1) spontaneous, 2) intentional, and 3) accompanied by laughter (Grindsted, 1997, p. 164). Humor in the workplace can reduce stress and enhance group cohesiveness and communication (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

During the interviews, Finnish representatives spoke of having humorous interactions and laughing with the Chinese, which was helpful in improving the atmosphere and in finding common ground. Mutual understanding can be achieved through humor:

We often laugh quite much in the meetings with delegations. In certain situations, somebody makes a joke and laughs, and it's not a problem. I think it's not so that we do not understand their humor; we laugh at similar things, at least in situations that I have been. (IV6)

During the observations, it was also possible to see that laughter or seeing some situation in a humorous light is an integral part of visits and communication, especially in less formal situations, for instance when having meals and demonstrations. When a Chinese group was introduced to the virtual reality glasses during their visit to Turku, a junior Chinese group member agreed to try out an exciting virtual ride on the rollercoaster. The person assisting them recommended that he sit down because some people had previously had strong reactions and the person trying them out might lose their balance if they remain standing. When the junior delegate expressed his excitement about the ride, other members of the delegation laughed. Later during lunch in Turku, the Chinese asked whether the Finnish hosts liked the food when they visited Tianjin. The Finns replied that they liked it very much, but some dishes were a bit spicy. To that, the Chinese also laughed (perhaps because Tianjin food is notoriously spicy).

One interviewee indicated that humor may be related to the necessity to find relief and relax during negotiations:

When there are negotiations, of course, we laugh together with the Chinese, but it is not so clear why. It is more like a habit or politeness to laugh about some, I would say, not so funny joke, but at least that is something to share with them. That is also a way to relax people – to tell a joke (IV3).

Another interviewee implied that he does not see humor as central for finding common ground, but it can improve the atmosphere:

It is not joke business, it is work, so I am not paying so much attention from that point. However, it sometimes helps to get a positive attitude and leads to the happy moments. Whether you get humor or not depends on the situation. (IV9)

Thus, in some situations, humor is seen as useful for creating common ground, and vice versa; having more common ground and knowing each other better results in more humor:

In governmental meetings, the humor and telling jokes - that doesn't usually happen in the first meeting. But when you know the person well and get into a closer relationship, then you can be a bit informal and bring humor into the discussion as well. (IV8)

One participant implied that the Chinese representatives try to use humor as a way to build common ground:

When the Chinese make jokes, I think possibly they understand that we are from a different culture and if in our culture we have jokes, then joking will be a way to find a common task. I think Chinese are really trying to be one with Westerners. (IV3).

Turning to the specifics of what the Chinese would joke about in these situations, the interviewee shared further:

From what I remember, their jokes are maybe related to something they know about Finland, about snow, or how cold it is. I think they can sometimes make this kind of jokes, then they are really pushing themselves, they are really trying. (IV3)

A similar situation was also observed during the visit from Oulu to Suzhou. There were a few jokes about the cold weather in Finland, and after that it was noted that there was still plenty of snow in Rovaniemi in May, and that Oulu was only three hours away from Santa Claus.

To sum up, humor, joking and laughter are seen as an integral part of the visits that served the purposes of feeling more relaxed, improving the atmosphere, and being polite. Thus, it can be favorable for building common ground. There is a suggestion that the Chinese may have tried to joke as an adjustment strategy to the Finnish side. Jokes may make use of the common knowledge that the other side have, such as the coldness in Finland or the spicy food in China. Humor can have a universal nature and be experienced as such in Finnish-Chinese cooperation.

Differences in humor and the concept of face

While using humor in negotiations can often be beneficial, the complex nature of joking and laughter in interactive business contexts is also clearly apparent. In the field of humor studies it has long been recognized that both that which counts as a joke may be culturally specific, and also that the sequencing and patterning of laughter may vary (Grindsted, 1997, p. 180). Attardo (1993) has explored the paradox of the communicative nature of jokes, which are defined as a type of text that may violate the principle of co-

operation. Humor involves accommodating two different face needs – the need for autonomy and the need for affiliation, one of which may be stronger in a particular culture (Brown & Levinson, 1987). One way to explain humor deals with superiority theory: we laugh at the errors of others because they enhance our feeling of superiority (Porteus, 1988). Boasting is a particular form of self-presentation, which can be done in a humorous way (Scollon & Scollon, 1983). With reference to positioning theory (Harre, 1991), when joking in these ways, a speaker tries to gain more power in the ongoing interaction and position him/herself more favorably. It is easy to laugh at a disassociated item, but disparagement of affiliated objects may cause insult. One also has to pay attention to team members and the face work of the whole group. While joking, one is involved in a dilemma, as it violates the need for personal autonomy. Not wanting to intrude on another person's autonomy may result in more self-ridicule joking (Grindsted, 1997, p. 172).

The participants of this study revealed their views on the differences between the Finnish and the Chinese sense of humor and expressed some puzzlement about topics that one culture laughed about and the other side seemed not to:

There is no black humor about death or some "dirty" things that we [the Finns] laugh about – I don't know if the Chinese are laughing about that. Also some absurd things that are funny for us are not funny for them. I have not really understood what is funny for them. (IV3)

Interviewees reported feeling cautious about using humor at times, as if perceived communication style differences would make one reluctant to use humor for building common ground:

Humor... it's an art in itself. So you have to understand when to make jokes, and if to make joke at all. To be safe, I would say, less is better. I have grown up in the Finnish-Western culture

and my facial and body language is more maybe US-American style, and they can sense it right away. But of course I am practicing to limit myself so that I can try to be as much Chinese as possible in front of the Chinese people. It's not that much fun, actually. (IV7)

Humor as a message may not get through: "There have been situations when I felt – ok, maybe they didn't get the joke at all." (IV3) However, one participant said that gradual adjustment process takes place in understanding humor and reading subtle signs:

Maybe somehow I also understand their humor, which I really do not understand, but maybe I can understand something about that. It is about understanding more about their culture and how to change my behavior from the signals that I can get on how they behave. (IV3)

Also another interviewee said that the knowledge of the other side is important: "I think sometimes when situation is right, you need to prepare even for humor, and you need to know your counterpart a little bit." (IV9)

Considering some of the complex dynamics of using humor in Finnish-Chinese co-operation, in particular participants spoke of the sensitivities they recognized surrounding Chinese 'face':

Surely, they have humor, but they are laughing at different things than Westerners; Chinese humor is very different from the humor in the Western world. In the Western world, we have a lot of irony; Chinese don't think about irony in that sense, because they kind of can't laugh for themselves because of losing their 'face.' (IV3) They like that kind of slap-stick humor – it is very direct about what happened to others, but not to themselves. If I say that Chinese can't laugh at themselves, I don't know if I am right, but sometimes I felt so. (IV5)

While these Finnish participants said the Chinese do not enjoy laughing about themselves much, it was also said that the Chinese would like to laugh about the Finnish stereotypical weakness: “they make jokes on us about drinking too much.” (IV6).

Referring to positioning theory (Harre, 1991), when one makes sure to assign certain roles to oneself and others in a way that enhances one’s own power position can be interpreted as involvement in the power play. During my observation of the Oulu delegation to Suzhou, on several occasions the Chinese laughed when learning about the small numbers associated with the Finnish population. During the visit, the delegation met a Chinese man whose son had studied in Oulu previously and had commented that it is “the smallest city in the world.” Making use of a contrast with China, a Finnish respondent said that Chinese like to joke rather boastfully about themselves: “they make jokes [about] the size of their organizations, and the size of China” (IV6).

To sum up, the difficulties in using humor experienced by the interviewees were related to the differences in the sense of humor, the topic of the jokes, and even body language during joking, all of which, however, can be gradually understood and adjusted to, to some degree. The Finnish representatives reported that it was important to get to know the Chinese representatives well in order to make such adjustments. Chinese ‘face’ was one area of sensitivity, where the Finnish interviewees said that generally, it was difficult for the Chinese to laugh at themselves, but they might joke boastfully about themselves at times. The Finnish stereotypical weaknesses of drinking and having small populations were reported as topics of laughter for the Chinese.

Discussion

From the participants’ responses it emerged that humor in Finnish-Chinese co-operation negotiations can be seen as both a simple and a complicated area. If humor goes well, it can assist in building common ground and in improving the negotiation

climate. However, humor can also touch on sensitive and at times difficult areas, and draw upon different styles, acceptable topics and ways of joking.

Simply laughing a little can be seen as easing the atmosphere when, upon meeting, the participating sides feel a bit nervous for example. Laughing and humor can be seen as a universal language to be utilized in the context of a great deal of uncertainty. Jokes at times appear to draw from national stereotypes and comparison of contrasts, such as large China, cold Finland, spicy food in China, and drinking too much in Finland. These jokes may serve a purpose of self-introduction or show what you know about the other side and, as such, can be an effort to build a bridge and create some common ground.

The data suggest that both sides try to adjust their ways of joking according to their perception of the other side’s expectations. For example, the Chinese may force themselves to joke while negotiating, and Finns learned about the specifics of the Chinese sense of humor and try to adjust to that. This also demonstrates efforts to use humor to create common ground. The adjustment may also have to do with the location of the visit: if the Chinese had arrived as visitors, they may think that they need to adjust to the local ways of negotiating, and their behavior may reflect their belief of what humor is like in Finland.

Referring to the participants of the study, there are, however, differences in sense of humor, which may make it complicated to use humor for building common ground. In addition, the probability that a joke is not understood may have to do with the fact that English is not the native language of either side. The sensitivity of Chinese ‘face’ was a concrete area of difference and difficulty described in detail by the interviewees. However, Finnish participants implied that the Chinese can laugh at themselves in the context of their own boastful jokes. Laughing at the Finnish weakness of drinking a great deal, and at the small numbers of people in the Finnish population was also reported and observed.

The primary contribution of this study has been to document the meanings that Finns attribute to their co-operation with the Chinese. An obvious limitation is that it was not possible to interview Chinese visitors, whose views and perceptions on humor would be equally interesting and important to consider. Consequently, this study gives more voice to the Finnish interpretation of humor with the Chinese. There is also a power imbalance in the representation, in spite of some participants being Chinese who work for the Finnish side. Stereotyping in these interpretations cannot be ruled out. The perceptions of the participants may be subjective and their expressions can in themselves be seen as a part of power positioning. At the same time, however, it is one window to reality and to achieving a nuanced understanding about the area of humor. A larger amount of observation data would allow for stronger claims about humor in interaction between the two groups.

Conclusion

Although the Finnish representatives mostly see humor as a site of a search for common ground, they also see that occasionally Chinese representatives may get involved in a humorous power play. With reference to Brown and Levinson (1987), it can be assumed that sometimes the autonomous 'face' needs to be accommodated, asserting the power positioning over the search for common ground. Hints of the autonomy of 'face' could be found in joking about others, boasting humorously and reluctance to laugh at oneself. At the same time, the 'face' of affiliation may manifest in attempts to adjust and joke during negotiations, even to the point of forcing oneself. It appears to be a complex endeavor to find the balance between needs of autonomy and affiliation when using humor as a means of expression.

This paper explored humor in the context of Finnish-Chinese co-operation, at a time when there is an emerging dynamic of Finns as sellers of investment targets and Chinese as investors. This newly developing intercultural communication context may

have similarities with what is happening in co-operation with China elsewhere in the world. Chinese adjustments to the perceived Western style of humor and the imitation of it in negotiations could be an interesting topic to consider in future research, as might the Chinese and other nationalities' perceptions of the Finnish sense of humor.

Returning to the fact that humor is believed to have a connection to playing (Boyd, 2004), a conclusion of this study is also that humor may deal with playful expressions of power; it involves power positioning in a playful way. Positions tend to be taken up according to an unfolding narrative depending upon the outcomes they generate (Davies & Harré, 1990). Adjustments in humor occur in hopes of reaping the benefits found in finding common ground, but in certain situations, autonomy and power may also be asserted.

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V

**LANGUAGE AS A SITE OF SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND
AND POWER POSITIONING IN CHINESE-FINNISH
INVESTMENT FACILITATION**

by

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LANGUAGE AS A SITE OF SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND AND POWER POSITIONING IN CHINESE- FINNISH INVESTMENT FACILITATION

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper explores how the role of language is perceived in Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation and what are its language-related negotiation specifics. In particular, the study considers how language underpins the search for common ground and connects to power positioning.

Design/methodology/approach: This study is based on data obtained by interviewing individuals who work either for one of the state agencies responsible for attracting Chinese investment or local governments in Finland and some observation in delegation meetings. The study uses Positioning theory by Harré (1991) and Politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) when analyzing interviewee's expressions regarding language related aspects in negotiations.

Findings: While Chinese venture capitalists and younger Chinese tend to use English directly, senior members of the government sector almost always use interpreters. Finnish representatives believe that at times it can be a conscious choice to use the Chinese language for direct speech despite knowing English. Finns adjust to this by having Chinese personnel who can handle matters with investors in Chinese. Interviewees expressed concern regarding the choice of the right interpreter / mediator. While there are efforts at creating common ground through the joint use of English, new power relations with China render the use of the Mandarin Chinese necessary as well.

Originality/Significance: Study reveals language related aspects in Chinese-Finnish investment facilitation context, but at the same time, as the whole world is approaching China in similar ways right now, insights of the study can be applicable on a wider scale and in various settings.

Keywords: language, power, negotiation, China, Finland, investment

Article classification: research paper

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the topic

The importance of co-operation with China has been growing in Finland and the rest of Europe in light of the recent increasing importance of China on a global scale and interest in attracting Chinese investments. In 2014, China became the world's third largest investor, driven by extraordinary large reserves (3,7 trillion) and a need to acquire foreign assets. Privately owned companies now represent 48,8% of foreign investment, compared to state-owned enterprises. According to official data from the end of 2013, 8% of China's FDI stock is in EU. EU is key destination for Chinese firms and amass 4 of every 10 USD invested in developed countries. Chinese investment hit an all-time high in 2014, at 20,170 million, indicating growth of 117% when compared to the 2013. Chinese investment in Europe is concentrated in the countries of core economies, such as UK and France. Chinese capital markets were in turmoil in summer 2015, but the trends suggest that Chinese companies will continue to internationalize (Casaburi, 2015).

Finland and the Baltic Sea Region as a whole so far has not been the major destination of Chinese investments. However, there has been rise in Chinese interest in the region during recent years, and also more awareness in Finland regarding the rising China phenomenon and the possibilities related to Chinese investment (Kaartemo, 2007). Finland has established governmental agencies to aid Chinese investment and ensured the co-operation of regional and local governments in the framework activities, such as town twinning. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland released China Action Plan in 2010 which recognizes the growing role of China on the international scene and states priority areas for co-operation. Finland is paying a lot of attention to investment promotion and facilitation which involves having special organizations for this purpose, informative materials, soft landing services, promoting investment targets, and being a bridge in-between investors and companies in need of investment. An important part of investment facilitation and wider co-operation comprises delegation visits by both interested nations to the other country. These involve enterprise interest matchmaking events, meetings with officials, company visits, etc. The terms of investment attraction, promotion and facilitation will be used interchangeably in this paper, understood as activities aimed at increasing investment and enhancing its contribution to national economic development. It involves planning on most effective use of resources and organization of investment promotion activities in the government and developing policies which improve the investment climate (OECD, 2015).

For the last 30 years, the majority of FDI projects between partners from China and the rest of the world have taken place in mainland China, and most studies have addressed this direction of investment (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2010), focusing mainly on economic and political factors. However, communication is also important to consider in the context of investment facilitation. Due to

communication challenges even well justified FDI projects can experience unexpected difficulties (Morck *et al.*, 2008). So far, adjustment to the Chinese has been predominantly studied as an expatriate experience in China (Selmer, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2014). At times this literature suffers from a traditional 'foreign-expatriate-in-China' complex, viewing China and the Chinese as "they" who need to be motivated, educated, managed and controlled by "we" (Fang 2012, p. 969). As investments flow in the opposite direction, the people in so-called Western nations are more often taking the position of the 'seller,' offering investment targets to the Chinese or trying to gain a foothold in the Chinese market.

This study proceeded in an inductive manner with a broad interest in Finnish-Chinese communication in the context of investment attraction. As the overall theme of the dissertation emerged the intertwining of search for common ground and power positioning. One of the smaller themes identified was the role of language in negotiations. The purpose of this paper is to consider how the language related aspects underpin the search for common ground and power positioning in Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation. The research question which paper aims to answer is - How the role of language is perceived in Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation and what is the language related specifics of this context?

1.2 Language and negotiation

In Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation, just as in many other contexts of international business affairs nowadays, English is mostly used as lingua franca, either directly or through interpretation. The concept of nuclear English is based on the fact that a single medium is needed for international communication, and the best candidate is English (Quirk, 2006, p. 222). English is a language of strangers, and it is comparatively low context if compared to other languages and well adapted to explication (Katan, 1999, p.184). English needs to be learned by the non-native carefully and in a corresponding extent to situation where it will be used as an international medium (Quirk, 2006, p. 229). English in this situation is not a way to imitate English or American culture, but a medium to express culturally and socially unique ideas, feelings and identities, to people in the world, native and non-native speakers alike (Berns, 2006, p. 10).

In practice, however, English is often not used directly, but through interpretation to the Chinese side. Despite having learned English and possibly being able to read, write and understand it, Chinese may not be good at speaking English because they can be socialized in a culture which does not encourage to speaking out. The Chinese ability to understand but inability to verbalize may give them significant bargaining advantage at the negotiation table. (Fang, 1999, p. 99-100). There is a long history of using interpreter in official negotiations with China, and a wealth of secondary materials on this topic. For instance, in the First Opium War (1839-1842) the Chinese and British, with huge cultural and language differences, had to rely heavily on a few exceptional individuals for translation and interpretation. The Chinese employed the compradors (trade

intermediaries) and merchants, while the British employed missionaries and colonial administrators (Wong, 2007). Generally Chinese see interpreters as having a low status, although they sit next to the principals of the negotiating teams. When speaking, one is advised to look at the principal, and not the interpreter (Woo and Prud'homme, 1999).

There are issues when using English as the third language. Sentences that translate each other grammatically may be mistakenly taken as equivalent culturally. "(In)visible (mis)understandings" may arise, because usually participants assume they understand the meanings, but there are times when sides together misunderstand each other and do not even notice it (Carbaugh 2005, p. xxii). There may or may not be a 'common ground,' which is an important part of context of an utterance. One side may take some common ground for granted while it may not in fact be shared by the opposite side. Not everyone may know or believe the same things, and especially so for people with very different backgrounds (Korta and Perry, 2011). Misperception, misinterpretation and mistranslation can easily occur when out-of-awareness orientations are not taken into consideration (Katan, 1999, p. 241). For instance, Chinese form of negotiation presumes a meaning of 'support', however, Chinese signaling of support is typically not visible to Dutch (Carbaugh, 2005, p. 2).

In mediated face-to-face communication or dialogue interpretation, the intermediate position is evidently physical; the interpreter is the person in the middle. Thus, it is useful to think of interpreter's position in the interactional sense - the distance or proximity to each party and on whose side the interpreter is. Interpreter's actions have immediate effect on the outcome of the interaction, so the role is seen as that of moderating and managing interaction to guide it towards a felicitous outcome. Examples could be explanatory additions, selective omissions, persuasive elaboration or the mitigation of face-threatening acts, intervening to reduce differences and promote understanding (Pochhacker, 2008, p. 13-14). Technical language needs special training, grammatically correct sentence otherwise will anyway not make sense. Interpreters need to know about the geography and the contemporary social and political history, which form the backbone of the culture's cognitive environment, and be aware of the popular culture (Katan, 1999, p.7-10). The mediator needs to participate in both cultures to some extent, be bicultural. In addition, individual needs to be flexible in switching his cultural orientation (Taft, 1981, p. 53). Communication is based on interactive meaning generation and interpretation on the one hand, and on dynamic negotiation and interpretation of context on the other. All communication starts from a certain relevant given context, and dynamically and effectively arrives at the invisible implicit premise(s) and implicit conclusion (Hou, 2003).

This study will contribute to understanding of the role of language in negotiation by exploring the specific context of Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation. The paper will bring into discussion how search for common ground and power positioning occurs through language.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This study builds on Davies and Harré's (1991) Positioning theory, which addresses power, positioning and accommodation in intercultural communication. The theory involves the need to attend to local moral orders, and centers on the view that local distribution of rights and duties determine different kinds of acts and the way episodes unfold. There is the option of multiple choices for an individual to position themselves in response to the unfolding narrative and to change and adjust their position (Davies and Harré, 1990). In all human interaction there are asymmetries in the resources for social action that are available to each individual in concrete circumstances. A cluster of short-term disputable rights, obligations and duties is called a position, and it determines the way people have access to cultural resources (Harré, 2012, p. 192-194). Harré and Moghaddam (2003, p. 138), using Positioning theory to analyze Kissinger's papers, conclude that many important interactions between nation states take place in the form of small-scale interactions between very few representatives. Sustaining intergroup harmony requires that a certain range of interpretations for an individual's actions are pre-established; the individual can be cast into certain positions by the dominant speaker, but positions can also be challenged or revised. The group context is evaluated in terms of secure or threatening relationship perceptions, giving rise to normatively prescribed co-operative or competitive behavior. The positions can be internally inconsistent and externally contested (Louis, 2008, p. 23). The Positioning Theory is a suitable resource to consider how the aspects of power unfold in search for common ground in language in the dynamic context of Finnish-Chinese investment attraction.

In addition to the Positioning Theory, the paper will also utilize Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to this theory, any act of communication is an imposition on the hearers 'face' which requires balancing positive (contributing to society) and negative (indicating autonomy) 'face'. These 'face' needs relate to politeness strategies (Scollon and Scollon, 1983, p. 166). When using solidarity politeness strategies, the focus is on common grounds of participants relations. One party may choose to emphasize the common grounds while the other one may emphasize fundamental differences (Scollon and Scollon, 1983, p. 185). Politeness Theory is suitable for the context of Chinese investment facilitation, because 'face' is an important notion for the Chinese. Indirect communication is traditionally seen as one of the characteristic traits in Chinese working life, which "helps to prevent the embarrassment of disagreement among partners, leaving the relationship and each other's 'face' intact" (Ock Yum, 1997, p. 85). Politeness theory has traditionally focused on harmonious aspect of social relationships, but people also sometimes attack rather than support their interlocutors. Politeness needs to be studied from broader framework of 'face' work; politeness is more the question of appropriateness. A term *rapport management* has been suggested regarding the use of language to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious social relations (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 2-3)

The connection in-between the Positioning Theory and Politeness theory is that they both involve the participant's choice how to respond. While Positioning Theory considers the context and the narrative (largely outer circumstances) according to which one chooses common ground or power, the Politeness Theory reveals more about inner motivations (considerations of 'face') for doing so. Both sites are explanatory regarding language, which is simultaneously a site of search for common ground and a power positioning.

Power and common ground are two main concepts of this paper. Regarding power, the approach of 'power as described' (Jensen, 2006) will be utilized. This approach treats power as a description of how people define their own actions in relation to power, so it is suitable for analyzing interview statements. Power will also be understood as something produced in interactions and within structures where people are placed in different positions and must make communication choices accordingly (Isotalus, 2006).

Common ground in a pragmatic sense can be understood as mutual interest in a matter that enables parties to move forward with some common goals in co-operation, trade or investment. Garber (2006) sees finding common ground as one aspect of collaborative management, since organizations everywhere are challenged to work more closely with one another. Gray (1989) states that collaboration is necessary for finding common ground, defining the following key steps: exploring how to get parties together to define the problem, establishing an agenda, and implementing a solution. The concept of common ground will also be used regarding communication – achieving enough joint understanding about a matter that makes it possible to proceed with the communication and with working together. Stalnaker (1999) considers that common ground involves intuitions about what is not said, but merely presupposed and plays an important role in the communication process. The complex underpinnings of language in the search of common ground are well illustrated by this quote:

The solution is not to adopt standard English, or even learning another's communication system, it is more complex. Solution is cultivation of international, interethnic, intercultural communication style of deference politeness. Communication is difficult - we must minimize our impositions on others, leave them, acting as they choose and make minimal assumptions about the wants, needs, and priorities of others. Only common ground is without discrimination valued assumption of difference, solidarity politeness. (Scollon and Scollon, 1983, p. 186)

1.4 Methodology and materials

This paper builds on data collected as a part of larger research project. The study's main methodological approach was interviewing for the purpose of learning the meanings that Finnish representatives assign to their communication with the Chinese co-operation partners. Some participant observation was also conducted to give access to naturally occurring negotiation, and to provide a fuller sense of the context. Observation, for six days in total, took place during delegation visits from Tianjin (major port city in northeastern China) to Turku

(city on the southwest coast of Finland) in October 2013 and a Finnish delegation visit from Oulu (most populous city in Northern Finland) to Suzhou (city close to Shanghai) in May 2014. Unfortunately, it was complicated to obtain access for interviewing the Chinese visitors, due to short and fully packed visits.

This paper is mostly based on nine interviews carried out in the autumn of 2013 in the China Finland Golden Bridge (state agency for Chinese investment attraction) office in Helsinki and in local government offices in Turku and Lahti (economic hub city north-east of Helsinki). In a qualitative framework, research based on interviews seeks to manifest meanings; therefore, a small number of cases facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents and inquiry in naturalistic settings (Crouch, 2006). The interviewees were aged from their mid-20s to 60s and had experience in Chinese co-operation of between 4 and 20 years. Five of the interviewees were Finns, three were of Chinese origin and one was Japanese, but all had lived and worked in Finland between 5 and 20 years. Four of the interviewees were representatives of local or regional governments; three were team members of a state investment attraction agency, and two were Chinese interpreters working for the Finns. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, encouraging interviewees to offer their own definitions of particular activities (Silverman, 2006; Briggs, 1986), broadly addressing the experiences of working with the Chinese and meetings in both Finland and China. Interview was started off by asking about the interviewee's role in the organization and the background expertise and then learning the patterns of exposure with the Chinese partners. There were questions about the communication style with the Chinese and possible cultural factors involved in various settings of work, inviting to share positive or negative critical incidents and conclusions about co-operation. Interviews were about one hour long. The interviews were conducted in English due to linguistic limitations of the researcher and also because this is the language mostly used in the investment facilitation context. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviewees were coded IV1-9 according the interview sequence and country of origin and their basic data are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Interviewee codes and basic data

Code	Gender	Country of origin	Title
IV1Jp	female	Japan	Business Development Officer
IV2Ch	male	China	Interpreter
IV3Fi	male	Finland	Development Manager
IV4Ch	female	China	Interpreter
IV5Fi	male	Finland	Senior Advisor
IV6Fi	male	Finland	Head of International Affairs
IV7Ch	male	China	Business Development Manager
IV8Fi	female	Finland	Customer Operations Director
IV9Fi	male	Finland	General Manager

Close reading of the material allowed some recurrent patterns to be found. Analysis began with own interpretations of what the informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematizing those. It is important to remember that “our data are constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (Geertz, 1973, p. 2-3). It is the context within which events, behaviors, and processes can be intelligibly – thickly described. Based on thick description of major themes in data (Spradley, 1980), as the overall theme connecting all these topics emerged the intertwining of search for common ground and power positioning. This paper in particular considers how that manifests in language related aspects of Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation.

2. Language in investment facilitation

2.1 Using English directly or through interpretation

In order to consider the use of English as *lingua franca* in Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation, at first it is useful to briefly turn to the status of English language in each country. Finland is linguistically a very homogeneous nation and populations representing foreign languages are modest in size. Finnish students need to know languages that are more widely used internationally; therefore foreign languages are introduced early in the school curriculum. By far the most popular first foreign language in Finland is English; there is overwhelming support for the view that English is the most important international language. English is also heard and used out of school – on TV, music, etc. Some schools use an immersion method where only English is used in learning, thus the language is acquired naturally (Björklund and Suni, 2000).

Chinese Englishes, in turn, involve a rich history of cultural contact, learning and teaching from the early 17th century until now, where each historical period and geographical area can be characterized by a certain kind of English (pidgin English, Canton English, etc.). Nowadays there are new phenomena such as Li Yang’s *crazy English* approach to teaching, which is aimed at making money internationally. Hongkong English as a separate unit is characterized by a distinct accent and lexicon. The popularity of English has reached new peaks with government policy makers, educationalists, and the Chinese public (Bolton, 2006, p. 148-149).

Referring to the data of this study, English is most often used as *lingua franca* in Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation negotiations. The Finnish side practically always uses English directly, but regarding the Chinese, the situation was described as follows:

When you talk with the Chinese venture capitalists, they usually have a background that they have been studying in U.S. or have been going to an international business school. They have been running the funds all over the world, so these people, as a group in China, are quite global-minded and speak good English. (IV8Fi)

In my experience, mostly Chinese younger generation speaks English, not the government delegation leaders. Although once someone from the government came from the international exchange or trade center and he spoke perfect English. If the delegation leader requires an interpreter, maybe he is not so comfortable with English, or he is thinking about the rest of the group. In this case he either wouldn't speak English, or sometimes will pose a sentence or question to show that he speaks English, too. (IV4Ch).

Visiting Chinese speak English, but maybe older members of delegation don't. Mostly they then will have an interpreter or younger staff member who could speak English. (IV7Ch)

The trend that senior government members rarely speak English was verified also in observation activities. During a visit from Tianjin to Turku for instance, all official talks occurred through interpretation. Only at the break time, the youngest delegation member, a man in his early 30s was having some informal direct interactions in English with the Finnish hosts. Thus, while English is often used as lingua franca in Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation, it is still oftentimes through interpretation from the Mandarin Chinese.

One interviewee shared that in his experience, government or local government delegation heads in particular most often do not speak English or choose not to: "Usually the heads of delegations don't speak English. They almost always have someone to interpret." (IV3Fi) The lack of English skills was related by this participant of the study with a stronger affect of Chinese traditional culture: "The guys who don't speak any English and have not been abroad would like to have Chinese food." (IV3Fi)

According to one interviewee, not speaking English directly can also be a conscious choice:

The delegation leader actually may speak English and very good English, but it is kind of status thing - even if they speak English, they let somebody else interpret (IV4Ch).

The language barrier may affect the effectiveness of co-operation, as observed by an interpreter accompanying delegations:

The Finnish side usually would like to follow-up what the Chinese wrote about Finland, but there are not so many such materials, maybe it is also because of language barriers. They go to Finland, because they heard that there will be an interpreter, so even though they could not speak English, they just go to Finland, some other land. (IV2Ch)

At the state investment attraction agency, Chinese employees are being hired for communication with the potential investors in China, which is considered a necessity:

I think that they (investors /customers) prefer to use Chinese in all ways, either in meetings, e-mails or phone calls. It is a good thing that we have Chinese people who can do that. (IV9Fi)

I communicate a lot with our Chinese clients, and because I don't speak Chinese, of course some of the communication needs to be handled through my colleagues who

can speak Chinese. Mostly it is kind of 'in-between the lines' information which might not be in the e-mails or in the English talk, for which customers are contacted to cell phone. (IV8Fi)

As a whole, this team works very effectively in Finnish way. However, we have a Chinese interface, and when we are dealing with the Chinese, it is a little bit Chinese-like. It is very important that we have Chinese team members and the Chinese interface. (IV7Ch)

Turning more specifically to the role of interpreter or mediator in negotiation, interviewees noted the importance of familiarity with Finland for successful interpretation:

My first Chinese assistant had studied a couple of years in Finland, so she knew a little bit the Finnish way of thinking, which made things much easier. (IV5Fi)

The more the interpreter has background of the Finnish system and the Finnish way of life, the better, because then he or she can explain things better and open up what we mean. (IV6Fi)

While familiarity with Finland is good for an interpreter of Chinese origin, good integration into Finnish system at times comes at the expense of getting further away from the Chinese side. Two Chinese participants of the study shared their concern about the matter:

If a Finnish-born Chinese takes the position of mediator, it doesn't have good result, only some level of co-operation and understanding, because such person doesn't really have the Chinese way of knowledge. I think it also requires mature person, not very young. (IV2Ch)

My family moved from China to Finland when I was seven years old. My spoken Chinese is fine, but my written Chinese is about lower elementary level. I cannot communicate in a very professional way in writing, so at the moment most of written interaction will be handled by my other Chinese colleague. Because of this background issue I am more interacting with the Finnish or other international people instead of the Chinese side. (IV7Ch)

Thus, according to interviewees, it can be difficult to find a perfect match for interpreter or mediator and to obtain a balance of familiarity regarding systems, communication, and the way of life.

To sum up, while occasionally, English may be used directly in negotiations, especially with venture capitalists and younger delegation members, the reality of Finnish-Chinese investment attraction is that quite often interpretation is necessary for the Chinese representatives. Often it is related to lack of English skills, but occasionally it is seen as a conscious choice to do so for other reasons. The Chinese delegation may have own interpreter, or the Finnish side may need to adjust and hire a Chinese person for purposes of communication.

2.2 Possible misunderstandings while using English

Joint use of English does not automatically assure that the message will come through. In various languages, there are different ways to express coherent se-

quence, request, statement requiring answer, situation requiring greeting, normal duration of silence, etc. Therefore, nonequivalence will manifest more visibly if shared language is second one for both parties, as mostly is the case for Chinese-Finnish investment facilitation. Even if sides have sufficient level of English skills to communicate well, non-native speakers tend to use another language in own distinct ways that may make the meaning blurred (Hymes, 1974, p. 49).

The essential challenge posed by difference between languages and related factors such as communication styles and culture was mentioned by several interviewees:

There is huge difference in communication, the cultures are totally different, and language is so, so different. (IV3Fi)

It is a learning process that it is a big country with strange culture, strange language, strange letters and everything – so it takes time for you to believe (IV6Fi)

The fact that misunderstandings do happen in negotiations was discussed by several interviewees:

I sometimes I feel like I have to explain that same thing about five times by e-mail – this is how I want it! No – this is how we want it! Misunderstandings... those can arise from the fact that we both are communicating in a foreign language. Our communication is in English, and it depends how good their English is. I think I have explained in an easy way, in easy English, but not necessarily for them, they are maybe thinking something else. (IV1Jp)

That is everyday business - there are always misunderstandings. You always need to make sure that you have understood right what the other party was saying, and that the other party understood that situation right. The verbal and the written communication are both needed. So we always need to include in the negotiations ensuring if we understand each other right. And later on, if we feel there might be a misunderstanding, we ask our people to call them directly and ask in Chinese, what is the background of this and if did we understand correctly (IV9Fi).

There can be misunderstandings related to specifics of the languages. One interviewee shared an area of such specific difference regarding numbers, which is important in investment attraction context:

We count – ten, hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, one million, etc. But they count differently - ten hundred, ten ten thousand, hundred ten thousand, and then there is a new word... Have to know this! Understand what is the idea, otherwise it goes wrong. So far I never met an interpreter who got this perfectly. (IV5Fi)

Recognizing the possible differences posed by languages and context, one interviewee suggested that the speaker needs to anticipate and to bridge the difference:

When you use in Chinese in the meeting, you really need to ensure that you find really matching as we understand it (IV9Fi).

When I speak or explain something and give a presentation, I have to carefully remember to give them tools, instruments how to realize what I am talking about, be-

cause the things that are everyday for me are not for them. I can go to the Mayor's room and ask his opinion about something. In China, most probably, you would have to write it down on an official paper that the secretary gives to the Mayor and then some day, you will get orders what to do. (IV6Fi)

This, of course, goes both ways – also the Finns need to understand the Chinese system to be able to correctly interpret what happens and is being said. The hearer determines what speaker says from linguistic meaning and contextual information concerning speaker's intentions (Bach and Harnish, 1979). Using a language that is other than the native, linguistic meaning can be unclear at times. In addition, oftentimes listener may lack contextual information to interpret what is being said. Contexting becomes very important; this concept was firstly discussed by Hall (1983, 59-77). Thus, in addition to knowing the specifics of language, successful interpreter also need to know the context well enough:

When it comes to the city organization or city tasks, so often interpreter doesn't understand how the Finnish system works. Yes, they can do the interpretation, and they know the words, but you notice that they don't understand what you really mean. The systems differ, and the management and leadership also have a big difference. So you should start from very basis - telling about the political system, or the parties. (IV6Fi)

The role of the interpreter is crucial for overcoming misunderstandings. Every interpreter is also a cultural mediator who facilitates communication, understanding, and action between persons or groups differing in respect to language and culture. This role is performed by interpreting the expressions, intentions, perceptions, and expectations of each cultural group to the other by establishing and balancing communication between them (Taft, 1981, p. 53). In situations when interpretation is necessary, the interpreter has an important role, being an instrument in search of common ground. The experience of interpreting and knowledge of topic area as well as availability of contextual information matters:

Definitely, in the beginning I was not so confident to interpret, even had some little misunderstandings, but later on gained the security and confidence. Also many tasks, the way of attitude and questions are pretty similar, then of course, much easier to handle. (IV2Ch)

The interpreter is very important. Have to interpret the information with the right context so they don't get the wrong idea. I think now for better preparation I would ask them to give me some materials on the industries they own. But sometimes, they don't give you anything and it's difficult to interpret then. (IV4Ch)

Since the reference systems for interpretation may often be different, there are many obstacles for getting the real meaning of the message through. However, people use all kinds of information available to get to the meaning of the utterance. According to the relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986), people naturally strive for maximization of relevance to achieve the best cognitive effect with the least processing effort. When sides are motivated to understand

and be understood, also other factors, for instance, non-verbal communication means may aid for getting the message through (Korta and Perry, 2011). Thus, despite the challenges, there is anyways hope for understanding each other. One person felt particularly positive about finding common ground between Finnish and Chinese side:

With my limited experience with the Chinese, I find it surprisingly simple from my perspective as a Finn. When I started this work I thought that it is more challenging than it actually is, so this is always coming from what kind of character you have, or what kind of communicator you are yourself. I find it very easy; I don't speak Chinese, but I find the communication very easy. Of course, there are some situations when I feel that I do not really understand what just happened and how the person is interpreting me, but with an open and humble attitude in communication situations, you can overcome the small cultural obstacles. It's more like just finding your way; in a global context you have to be adjustable anyways. You are always mirroring how the other party is reacting. (IV8Fi)

Another interviewee also expressed positive views regarding finding understanding despite the language barriers:

I don't have much experience with misunderstandings; maybe I have been interpreting so well. I think some minor misunderstanding may happen when using a bit different kind of phrase and words, but there haven't been major problems. To make it more efficient, I think that the best way is making both agree to have the same level of understanding of the issue (IV4Ch).

More experience in each other's company provides better interpretive frame to get to the meaning of remarks:

The more we start to understand their mentality - how people speak to each other, when they have to consider who is higher in the organization, how they discuss with each other, who gets orders from whom and what are cultural backgrounds for some of behaviors - the more relaxed you are and the more you can enjoy the situation. (IV6Fi)

To sum up, misunderstandings was an important theme in interviewee's answers. Misunderstandings were seen arising from the fact that both parties are not speaking in their own language, so the linguistic meaning at times may be unclear. In addition, the framework of context and cultural background is also necessary to interpret the utterances correctly. Having the personal flexibility, ensuring the same level of understanding and being familiar with the mentality of another were seen helpful for getting to the meanings during negotiations. The interviewee's statements about understanding each other reflected mainly effort at ensuring common ground.

3. Discussion and conclusion

This paper explored one of the themes in study data on communication in Finnish-Chinese investment facilitation - the role of language, simultaneously seeing it as a site of search for common ground and power positioning. It was not possible to explore this topic very much in-depth due to limited amount of data,

however, enough to consider context of language usage from several angles and to draw some conclusions.

English is most often used as *lingua franca* in Chinese-Finnish investment facilitation. While Finns use it directly, the Chinese side often resorts to using an interpreter; especially typical it is for government or local government officials who are mature in age. This pattern was evidenced in both Finland and China as meeting locations. Venture capitalists would often use English directly and may also be of younger age. Thus, it appears that currently there are two directions regarding language aspect with the Chinese – more proficient English use by Chinese venture capitalists, but in some contexts, stronger assertion of Mandarin Chinese by government officials. Direct use of English could be seen not only as a matter of ability or marker of certain group (venture capitalist, young generation), but also making emphasis on common ground. While the choice of using Chinese at times has to do with the lack of English skills, it appears not to be the only factor. As a large nation, China may insist more on using own language on official occasions and adjust to others less. ‘Face’ considerations, hierarchical thinking and preference for mediated communication may also render the use of interpreter necessary. The choice to use the Mandarin Chinese can be interpreted as indication of the autonomy need of ‘face’ and power positioning in the narrative of China as a large rising country. Finnish representatives at the state investment attraction agency extend common ground by adjusting and having staff who can speak Chinese, this way accommodating the Chinese partners. It implies the necessity of Chinese speaking staff for smoother interactions in investment facilitation area. The new dynamics of investment attraction is seeing interactions with the Chinese investors as customer operations. The interpreter can be an instrument in power play – distance or proximity to each side plays a role in this. While Finns expressed a wish to have an interpreter who is familiar enough with Finland, the Chinese participants of the study expressed concern that this at times comes at the expense of getting further away from the Chinese side.

When using non-native language whether communication is direct or mediated, misunderstandings tend to arise. The fact that the utterance is not understood may have to do with the fact that English is not the native language for both co-operating sides. There may be a lack of contextual information and different meanings attached in different cultures. The meaning may get lost in the interpretation or be misunderstood due to an imprecise wording. However, having the personal flexibility, ensuring the same level of understanding and being familiar with the mentality of another were seen helpful for getting to the meanings during negotiations. The interviewee’s statements about understanding each other reflected mainly effort at ensuring common ground.

To conclude, while the Finnish representatives mostly see language as a site of search for common ground, always using English directly and even the Chinese staff for assistance with Mandarin Chinese when necessary, the Chinese representatives may stick with using Mandarin Chinese. Referring to Brown and Levinson (1987), it can be assumed that sometimes the autonomous

'face' needs to be accommodated by the Chinese representatives, asserting the power positioning over the search of common ground. At the same time, the 'face' of affiliation manifests in trying to overcome misunderstandings. It appears to be a complex endeavor to find the balance between the needs of autonomy and affiliation in the area of language. This goes also for the role of the mediator or interpreter. Who's side is he/she on and is the familiarity with Finland / China sufficient? Finns want to have person who is familiar with Finland, but it is also important to have sufficient integration with life in China and the Chinese side. Too much to either direction is also considered problematic. This study suggests the need for careful use of linguistic and cultural mediators, being aware that getting closer to one side comes at the expense of getting farther from another. Finding an ideal balance is not an easy task. Adjustments regarding language occur in hopes of reaping benefits from finding common ground, but in certain situations, autonomy and power may also be asserted.

This study mostly helped to get to know the meanings that Finns attribute to the language aspect in their co-operation with the Chinese. An obvious limitation is that it was not possible to interview Chinese visitors, whose views and perceptions on language would be equally interesting and important to consider. However, the fact that the study involved three Chinese and one Japanese person working for the Finnish side allowed for some integration of Chinese / Asian perspective on the matter. More observation data would allow stronger claims about certain patterns regarding language as a site for search of common ground and power positioning.

The paper explored language in the context of Finnish-Chinese investment attraction, where there is an emerging dynamics of Finns as sellers of investment targets and Chinese as investors. This newly developing intercultural communication context may have similarities also with what is happening in Chinese investment facilitation elsewhere in the world. While the Positioning theory considers the context and the narrative according to which one chooses either common ground or power (outer circumstances), the Politeness theory reveals more about inner motivations (considerations of 'face') for doing so. The narrative of growing global status of China will continue to be a framework for positioning regarding the choice of language. In addition, the traditional notion of 'face' may continue to render the use of the Chinese language in these interactions necessary. Both aspects work more to the favor of the Chinese side and the use of Mandarin Chinese.

This study raises several questions for future research, keeping in mind that one of current power positioning narratives is that of rising China. How will the situation develop regarding the use of either English or Chinese in investment facilitation situations? As the new generation will be gradually entering the power positions, will English more often be used directly by the Chinese side? Or, as the position of the China on the global scale is becoming more important, will its representatives insist on speaking Chinese even despite knowing English? How to ascertain sufficient common ground in language for moving on with concrete goals in investment facilitation?

4. References

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