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HOW FINNISH EXCHANGE STUDENTS EXPERIENCED  
CULTURE SHOCK IN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Degree Programme in International Business  
2010

# MITEN SUOMALAISET OPISKELIJAT KOKIVAT KULTTUURISHOKIN KIINASSA

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Elokuu 2010  
Ohjaaja: Katajamäki, Outi  
Sivumäärä: 51  
Liitteitä: 1

Asiasanat: Kiina, Suomi, kulttuuri, kulttuurierot, kulttuurisokki

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Opinnäytetyön aiheena oli selvittää miten suomalaiset opiskelijat kokivat kulttuurisokin Kiinassa. Lisäksi tarkoitus oli selvittää miten opiskelijat lievensivät kulttuurisokkia ja miten he kokivat paluun kotimaahan. Tavoitteena oli, että tutkimus tulokset auttaisivat tulevia vaihto-opiskelijoita sopeutumaan uuteen opiskelu ympäristöön paremmin.

Opinnäytetyön ensimmäinen osa käsittelee käsitteitä kulttuuri, stereotyyppiä, kulttuurisokki ja paluusokki. Toinen osa sisältää kaksi teoriaa, Geert Hofstede'n kulttuurien ulottuvuudet ja Fons Trompenaars & Charles Hampden-Turnerin kansallista kulttuuria kuvaavan teorian. Kolmas osa vertaa Kiinan - ja Suomen kulttuurisia eroja. Viimeinen osa käsittelee empiiristä kyselytutkimusta ja sen tuloksia.

Tutkimus-aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoituna lomakehaastatteluna. Kohderyhmänä oli kymmenen opiskelijaa, jotka olivat opiskelleet yli kolme kuukautta eri puolilla Kiinaa, Shanghaissa, Changzhoussa ja Chengdussa. Suurin osa opiskelijoista oli Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelijoita. Kaikki kyselylomakkeeseen vastanneet asuivat Kiinassa yli kolme kuukautta, toiset jäivät pidemmäksi aikaa ja toiset palasivat takaisin Kiinaan vaihdon jälkeen.

Haastattelu-materiaali analysoitiin kahden teorian pohjalta ja omaa pohdintaa käyttäen. Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että mitä enemmän uudesta maasta vastanneet tiesivät asioita, sitä vähemmän he kokivat kulttuurishokin oireita. Tutkimus-tuloksista selvisi myös, että väsymys, yksinäisyys ja kielitaitojen puute olivat yleisimmät kulttuurisokin oireet.

Osa vastanneista koki, että jotkin asiat olivat muuttuneet kotimaassa, mutta ne eivät vaikuttaneet heihin. Muutama koki, että Suomi ei enää ole heidän kotimaansa. Kokonaisuudessaan kaikille opiskelu Kiinassa oli positiivinen kokemus.

## HOW FINNISH EXCHANGE STUDENTS EXPERIENCED CULTURE SHOCK IN PEOPLE´S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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August 2010  
Supervisor: Katajamäki, Outi  
Number of pages: 51  
Appendices: 1

Key words: People's Republic of China (PRC), Finland, culture, cultural differences, culture shock

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The purpose of this thesis was to examine how Finnish students experienced culture shock in People's Republic of China. As well the purpose was to examine how the students reduced the culture shock and how they experience the reverse shock. The aim was that the research results would help future exchange students to adapt to the new environment better.

The first part of the thesis discusses about the culture, stereotypes, culture shock and reverse shock. The second part includes two theories, Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner's theory. The third part will compare the Chinese and Finnish cultures. The last part will discuss about the research and the research results.

The research material was collected by a semi-structured interview. The target group included ten students which have studied over three months in different areas of People's Republic of China in Shanghai, Changzhou and Chengdu. Most of the interviewees were students from Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. All the interviewees stayed in People's Republic of China over three months, some stayed longer and some returned back to PRC after the exchange period.

The interview material was analyzed based on the two theories and based on own speculations. The research solved that the more the interviewees knew about the new country the less they experienced symptoms of the culture shock. The research also made clear that tiredness, loneliness and lack of language skills were the common culture shock symptoms.

Some of the interviewees felt that some things were changed in the home country but it did not affect to them. Few experienced that Finland is not their home country anymore. In its entirety the whole studying period in People's Republic of China was positive experience to all.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Culture is something that people have learned. In the world there are many different cultures. The topic of this thesis is how Finnish exchange students experienced culture shock, when they were studying in People's Republic of China. Thesis will help those students who are going to study in abroad, mainly in People's Republic of China. It might help them to adapt to the new culture better.

When talking about different cultures it is important to remember that in every country and culture there is different kind of cultural behavior. Inside the country there might be some smaller cultural groups which have their own rules. Between the male and female gender there is also some cultural differences. These cultural things that are presented in this thesis are generalizations.

The aim of this thesis is to find out what kind of culture shock the Finnish students experienced, when they were living under the Chinese culture. How was the adaptation to the new culture and how strong the shock was?

The thesis is about culture, culture shock and reverse culture shock. There will also be two theories presented, Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory and Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner's theory. Because the main focus is how the Finnish students experienced the culture shock in People's Republic of China, the thesis will tell about the Finnish and Chinese culture, and the differences and similarities of these two cultures. In the theory part there is also used some answers got from the questionnaire as examples.

The first part of the theses will tell about the culture, and what the culture includes, like stereotypes. In the stereotype part it includes also examples of the stereotypes that the interviewees have. The last part of the thesis is the empirical part. I did a questionnaire for Finnish students who have been in an exchange in People's Republic of China. I got ten answers, six of the interviewees were women and four of them were man. The average of the interviewees was 23.

When the thesis is telling about the People's Republic of China, I will use an abbreviation PRC meaning the simple name of the People's Republic of China.

## 2 CULTURE

World has many different cultures. People who share the same culture usually share same language. They think the same, behave the same and have the same attitudes towards different situations. Culture is something that human has learned from the environment where he/she has been living. If you are staying for a longer time in different culture, you usually experience culture shock, which is not a bad thing. People experience culture shock differently, the more you know about the culture you are going in, the easier you get through the culture shock. In this next chapter you will learn more about culture, culture shock and reverse shock.

### 2.1 Defining Culture

There are dozens of Culture related theories, but in every theory there are mutual features; collectiveness and community. Culture is always something that humans do, express or think. (Kupiainen J. & Sevänen E. 1994, 7.) Culture separates humans from animals (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 8-11). Humans are unique creatures which are born into the world of culture. Animals are born in the world where their primary obligation is to survive. Humans got the legacy from the previous generations, animals do not, and they are born as new creatures, free of any burden of the past. Animals, after they have born are most likely to face the world by themselves very soon. Human child needs its parents for many years until to be able to confront the world alone. In these early years the child will learn complicated cultural forms, which will be very important for the human to survive in the complex world. Humans are born in to a particular culture and there are specific features which we adapt to ourselves. (Richardson 2001, 8, 28.)

Culture is not something inherent; culture is something that you learn. The environment, attitudes and norms are things that shape your culture. Cultures are born between people's interactions. Common habits, taboos and traditions have an impact to the culture. Every people has their own culture and the people who share the same culture interpret the gestures, signs and symbols same way. Some of these gestures signs and symbols are universal, which means that the meaning is understood everywhere, but in some cases it is the opposite, and if you use it in wrong place it might cause some misunderstandings. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 8-11.)

The environment where you spend your childhood defines the culture what you have. Most of the people spend their childhood (under 7 years old) in one place so people learn to know only one culture. (Rapaille 2006 2007, 22). People who have lived in same environment try to behave in different environment and situations as they have used to in their own region. (Sinkkonen 2008, 40). This is the reason why people from different cultures behave and react to the same things differently. (Rapaille 2006 2007, 22.)

Like already have mentioned culture is not inherited; it comes from the person's social environment not from the genes. Culture includes the human nature and the individual's personality. Human nature means what all human beings have in common. Human nature includes for example the ability to feel anger, love, joy and sadness. The personality is individual and unique; person does not share personality with any other human being. Personality is partly inherited, partly learned and partly individual's unique set of genes. (Hofstede 1991, 5-6.)

Figure 1. shows that inside the triangle is culture, human nature and personality. The figure shows whether person has learned these things or are they inherited. Personality is in the top of the triangle, it is unique for all individuals and it is something that people have inherited but also learned. The second layer in the triangle is the culture, culture is something that people have learned and it is common for groups that have same kind of interests. The basic layer in the triangle is the human nature which is inherited and universal like the ability to feel anger. Human nature is something all humans have in common. (Hofstede 1991, 5-6.)





Figure 1. Three Levels of Uniqueness in Human Mental Programming (Hofstede 1991, 6).

Everybody categorizes other people easily, for example there are Chinese, Indian and American people. It could almost be the same if Finnish people were categorized to be European people – without special features of Finnish culture. Culture is something people in certain area share like habits, traditions, comprehension of what is right or wrong, language, food, smells, tastes, climate etc. Inside one territorial country there might be more than one culture. (Sinkkonen 2008, 41.)

There are several things that manifests the cultural differences. Four main terms that express best the cultural differences are symbols, heroes, rituals and values. (Hofstede 1991, 7.)

Symbols are things that only those who share the same culture can understand the meanings. Symbols could be words, gestures, pictures or objects. (Hofstede 1991, 7.) For example one of the Chinese symbols could be their unique characters. It takes time to study the Chinese characters. Somebody has said that when Chinese students study their mother tongue it takes ten times more time to learn it compared to learning eg. English, because there are over 2000 characters. (Guo 1997, 90.) In Finland one of the symbols which combines all Finnish people could be the word "Sisu". The word "sisu" means that the Finns do not give up in any situations. It is also contrast to the independency of the country. (Swallow 2008, 35, 55.)

Heroes can be persons who are alive or dead, real or imaginary, also phantasy and cartoon figures. Heroes are also things that some cultural groups have in common. (Hofstede 1991, 8.) For example for Finns the heroes are the gods. Kalevala is the national epic and from that story have come many gods that are for Finns heroes. For example Ukko is the god of the growth and Ilmarinen is the god of the wind and storm. (Swallow 2008, 78, 218-220.) For Finns the sport is very important thing and from that Finnish people got some persons that they might call heroes, for example Mika Häkkinen, the most successful Finnish Formula 1 driver (Kolbe 2005, 34, 47). For Chinese people there are several gods that influences to the Chinese nation. For example one of the legendary gods is Guandi, the god of war, numerous temples and shrines are named after Guandi. (Kingsley 1998, 34, 38.)

Rituals are mutual activities for those who share the same culture. Rituals can for example be ways of greeting and giving respect to others, and social and religious ceremonies. (Hofstede 1991, 8.) One example of the rituals for Finns could be religious ritual. Sacrament is the churches holy performance. Sacraments include christening, dedication to marriage, confirmation and blessing to the grave. (Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko, www-pages. 4.4.2010.) Rituals included the respect to others. This could be the best example of the Chinese ritual, because they have huge respect to the older ones and have close relations with families, especially the younger have a huge respect for the older ones. (Lewis 1996, 243-244.)

Values are things that children first learn directly. Psychologists believe that when child is at the age of ten he/she have learned their basic values, and after that age it is hard to change the values. (Hofstede 1991, 8.) Values can be recognized, questioned, cancelled or recreated. Recreation and confliction of values are one part of the cultural process. (Salminen K. & Poutanen P. 1996, 10.)

### 2.1.1 Stereotypes

Cultural differences sometimes will be expressed through stereotypes. Stereotype means generalized expression of some group of people. Stereotypes are categories that generalize and simplify our world. Stereotypes mean that some group has opinions about some other group, and usually the opinions are not true. Usually stereotypes are negative conceptions. (Tiittula 1993, 19-20.)

Through the stereotypes we tend to define individuals from each group. Stereotypes can be incorrect and lead to unfounded conclusion. Stereotypes are easy way to classify and all human beings uses stereotypes. The stereotypes from some social groups are not always valid beliefs. (Gannon 2004, 16-17.)

The students who answered the questionnaire had stereotypes about Chinese people and some where true but some not. Here are few examples of the stereotypes that the interviewees have.

“My stereotypes were that Chinese people don’t know much about anything else than their own country’s things, they have to study a lot because there is a lot of competition about the study places, many people are very poor and all the people are small. Those were my expectations about the people and I think that those were right.”

“I had the stereotypes that Chinese are always smiling and don’t like to express themselves in public = wrong. Also I thought that Chinese are very hospitable, this was right. I also thought that Chinese are very collective, this was truth also.”

“I had some things. For example that Chinese people are very friendly and polite and that they usually do what the most people do. With that I mean that they don’t want to be different. And I think those were right.”

## 2.2 Culture Shock

“The human mind treats a new idea the same way the body treats a strange protein; it rejects it”. P.B Medawar (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 55).

Culture shock means a change in your lifetime, which causes you a stress and tension when you are trying to live in a foreign culture (Aro 1998, 18). Culture shock means that the “old” culture (you are born in) and the “new” culture (you are now living) conflict with each other. Your body and mind object the new and weird things. This is something that you can not escape because you can not avoid it. Important is to identify the culture shock symptoms to accelerate getting rid of the culture shock. (Sinkkonen 2008, 79-80.) People who have worked or visited in some other country would say that cultural differences exist, like language, food, and manners are different (Hoecklin 1994, 23).

When person is in a short trip to abroad he/she usually experiences the new situations fascinating and being curious. The food is exotic, people are interesting and the landscapes are beautiful. Person will not feel any problems or some lack or faults because the situations just take a while, and the return to home is not far ahead. When the person is spending more time in the foreign country the situation is different. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 55.) People who go abroad will confront things that might disturb them; these cultural issues might shape the whole experience in a negative way. The best way to get along with the negative effects is to name and confront them. (Hess 1994, 11.)

In a foreign culture the things that people notice first are things that differ the most from your own culture. If you do not understand these things you can not either accept the things. Different things might annoy you from the beginning of the exchange to the end of it. It is important to understand that every people represent some cultural group. (Salminen K. & Poutanen P. 1996, 12-13.)

Typical culture shock symptoms are insomnia, tiredness, loneliness, anger, insecurity, fear, lack of appetite, suffering from the lack of working power and quality, increased use of alcohol or drugs or suffer from low self-esteem. Some people will not

feel that they have experienced culture shock. The result from not realizing the culture shock might be that the person has spent most of his/her time with a people who have similar cultural background than his/her own culture is. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 56.)

### 2.2.1 Defining Culture Shock

There are many factors that have an impact on how people experience culture shock. Everyone is different and also gets through every situation differently. Language, mind and behavior are things that have an impact on the ways you experience culture shock. Attitude and knowledge of intercultural communication are also important when you are in cross-cultural or multicultural environment (Sinkkonen 2008, 25).

Language is usually an issue that separates different cultures from each other. Language and culture belong together. Your own language skills have an impact to the way you experience different environments. When you are in an unfamiliar situation, your language skills and culture knowledge may cause you situations that are funny or you are misunderstood because of the cultural differences. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 44-51.)

When you know your skills, strengths and weaknesses, and you have the ability to react in the situations by suitable humor, then you are a real culturale traveler, and you have the right coping strategy. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 44-51.) When people are going abroad they often assume that if you know enough language or languages you will survive from any situations. English is the language that person usually uses and will survive by it, but if you can speak or understood the local language you will experience more. Knowledge of language is important in cross-cultural environment. (Sinkkonen 2008, 25-26.)

Mind impacts on the way you experience culture shock. If your language skills are insufficient you may feel that people do not understand you, and your communication is poor. You are afraid of speaking foreign language, you are nervous; you imagine that people who you talk with are impatient because the communication is not

working. If people feel that learning the new language is too difficult, he/she will get hostile towards the new culture and then learning new language will get more difficult.

People usually think that in the neighbour country, the culture is very similar to our own culture, but that's not true. It is usually easier to understand culture that differs much from your own culture, than those which are pretty close. If people think that own culture is the only right culture in the whole world, he/she will not see anything good, -and will never learn to enjoy or get new friends in the foreign culture. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 51-52.)

It is easier to find good sides, to enjoy things, and to please new people from the foreign culture if you are unprejudiced. If person experiences negative things, it usually leaves a bad impression of the foreign culture. For example if you lose your wallet, you get sick, someone treats you in a rude way, these things usually are claimed to be caused by the foreign culture and are a proof that the other culture is worse than our own culture. This is a natural part of the culture shock. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 51-52.)

Behavior shapes the way you experience different culture. Social behavior is completely dependent from the culture. Prejudices and attitudes have an important role when you are meeting a person from different culture. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 53.)

Attitude, the cultural knowledge and communication knowledge is also very important things. If you have the attitude you have more courage to be yourself in different situations. If you want to learn more about the culture you can search information by yourself. (Sinkkonen 2008, 25-26.)

### 2.2.2 Four Steps of Experiencing Culture Shock

The first step of experiencing culture shock is called honeymoon period. In this honeymoon period you are excited about the new culture and country. You see only good, beautiful and interesting things. (Aro 1998, 19.) In the first weeks the person finds every new situation to be fascinating. The length of this period is individual. It can take from two weeks to two months, sometimes half a year. The time you are spending in the foreign country and the differences compared to your own culture effects to the length of the honeymoon period. If the foreign culture is very similar to your own culture it takes more time to realize the differences and the honeymoon period will be longer. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 55-56.)

The second step, after the honeymoon period, is that the situation will go to the opposite way. Fascinating things cause now disgust and seem to be absurd. (Aro 1998, 19.) You feel frustration and irritation in everyday situations, usually in communication problems. Everything the person experiences he/she will compare to his/her own culture, and everything that is abnormal is annoying. This is also individual like the honeymoon period. Some people will isolate themselves; they will avoid any contact with the people from the foreign culture, while others tend to say their opinion about the things straightforward. Most will feel physically ill. This period will take several months, sometimes person will ever get rid of this period. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 56.)

The third step is that the person will accept the cultural differences and stop seeing things in black and white (Aro 1998, 19). The person will understand that he/she can not change the environment by his/her own actions. He/she will accept the foreign cultural behavior and circumstances and understand the meanings and backgrounds for the cultural phenomenon. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 56.)

The final fourth step is that the person's satisfaction increases and will finally end to the adaptation, he/she feels almost like being in home (Aro 1998, 19). When the person understands the foreign culture he/she will start acting according to the expectations of the environment. Finally the person will feel the foreign culture as his/her

own culture. This adaptation will take time and sometimes it takes years. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 56.)

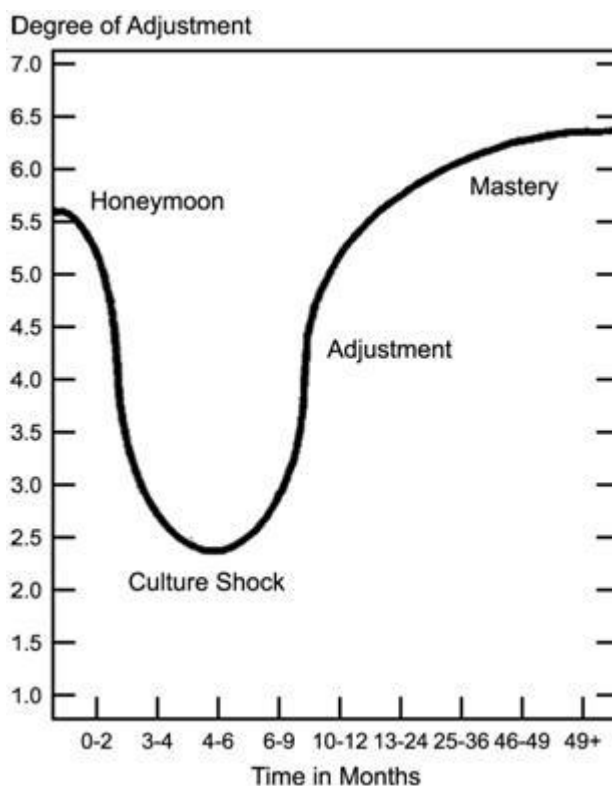


Figure 2. U-Curve by Oberg (Munich Business School, [www-pages, 19.5.2010](http://www-pages.19.5.2010)).

Figure 2 is the U-Curve by Oberg. It shows the four stages of experiencing culture shock. First was the honeymoon period, then the curve goes down and the culture shock step comes, feelings like frustration and irritation are common in this culture shock step. The third step is the adjustment, accepting the foreign cultural features. And the last, fourth one is the mastery, which means that the person is feeling that the foreign culture is his/her home.

### 2.2.3 How to Manage the Culture Shock

Culture shock includes four step; honeymoon period, frustration, accepting and adaptation. This is a process that can not be totally avoided. It can be refused but then it means that the person is not listening himself. It is important to learn to recognize the steps, and then realize that you will be part of some new environment. Culture shock



might cause physical or emotional feelings. The impact of the physical and emotional feelings depends on the way the person can receive different irritants. The way the person will experience these feelings affect to the expectations, previous experiences and experiences that he/she have heard from others. Reasons of experiencing culture shock are - that familiar signals are gone, the communication becomes difficult or person is experiencing identity crisis. (Sinkkonen 2008, 79-80.)

Experiencing culture shock in a new culture is natural thing. Helping the adaptation before going in to a new culture, is to learn things about the new culture. Social contact with the foreign people will help the adaptation in the beginning. Learning to know the local people helps the adaptation to the new environment as well. Writing diaries, letters or stories of the exchange period will help to reduce the culture shock symptoms. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2006, 57.)

Person can not change the host country's culture or local people, he/she can only change his own perspective. It is important to try to be realistic, and adapt to the new culture and find the own place in the new culture. It is also importantis to recognize the culture shock symptoms. Enjoying the host country's cultural features will help the adaptation. (Sinkkonen 2008, 84.) Every culture is as much multidimensional as yours, so finding easy explanations in different situations is not happening. (Mäntymaa M & Raunio A. 1997, 32).

#### 2.2.4 Reverse Culture Shock

When person has spent a long period in a foreign culture return to home country will make adaptation problems. This is called reverse shock. This might turn out to be harder than the original culture shock. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 57.) The attitude, ignorance and inexperience will affect to the return adaptation. If the adaptation to the host country has been challenging the return to home will be even more challenging. (Sinkkonen 2008, 169.)

One reaction that students might confront when returning home is that people are not interested about the experiences he/she has had. This has an effect to the reverse

shock. You might have experienced so much more than people in your home country. You have changed but also the people in the home country have changed. You will miss more the host country, if the life has been much different there, than in your home country. Important thing when returning is to blend the old me (before the exchange) and the new me (after the exchange) together. It is easier and quicker to adapt to the return if you get your routines such as work/school things, normalized. (Sinkkonen 2008, 171-172.)

There have possibly happened such changes in your home country which might cause you another adaptation. You also may see your own cultural features because you have now something to be compared to. You might have not maintained your social relations, and building a new social network is very troublesome. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 57.)

### 3 THEORIES OF CULTURES

In this third chapter there will be two theories presented. The first theory is Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. The dimensions are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance and the last one which is the newest, long-term orientation. The second theory is Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner the Six Dimensions of Cultural Diversity. The six dimensions are universalism versus particularism, individualism versus communitarianism, specificity versus diffusion, achieved status versus ascribed status, inner direction versus outer direction and sequential time versus synchronous time.

### 3.1 Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions Theory

"Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy. Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster." Prof. Geert Hofstede, Emeritus Professor, Maastricht University (Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, [www-pages, 13.3.2010](http://www-pages.13.3.2010)).

The most known classification of cultures is the one of Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. He has developed this model in the beginning of the 1980s. Hofstede describes cultures and differences between other cultures by using four dimensions. The four dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and individuality. The theory has also got one more dimension which is long-term orientation. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 20.) This theory is also known as Culture's Consequences it includes everybody who confront people outside his/her own narrow circle (Hofstede 1991, preface).

The world is full of people from different groups or different nations, these people think, feel and act differently so it causes confrontations. These groups and nations have common problems, like ecological, economical, military or hygienic and these problems demand cooperation for their solution. Because different groups or nations do not understand the way how some other groups representatives are thinking or acting, it leads to the situation that most of the solutions do not work or can not be executed. The way person is thinking, feeling or acting is learned throughout their lifetime, mostly in the childhood. (Hofstede 1991, 3-4.)

#### 3.1.1 The Power Distance

The power distance presents the polarization and use of power and attitudes towards the authority (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 20). In small power distance cultures there is limited dependence between employees and bosses, and limited preference for consultation; this means that the employees and bosses have interdependence between each other. Employees will quite easily approach the boss. (Hofstede 1991, 27-28.) In small power distance cultures there is equality between people, and par-

ents and children treats each other as equal (Sinkkonen 2008, 59). In large power distance cultures there is remarkable dependence between the employees and the bosses'. Employees do not approach so easily or directly the boss. (Hofstede 1991, 27-28.) Inequality is expected and accepted and children treat their parents with higher respect (Sinkkonen 2008, 59).

At school when the country is more in large power distance culture the relation between the teacher and the student is larger. For example the students have a high respect towards the teachers, especially if the teacher is older. In these cases for example students may have to stand up when the teacher enter to the classroom. In small power distance cultures teachers and students have more equal relation. Younger teachers are more liked because they are more equal with the students. Students and teachers have in the classes more interaction. Students are supposed to ask questions if they want to, they argue with the teachers, state disagreements and criticize. (Hofstede 1991, 34.)

### 3.1.2 Individualism versus Collectivism

One of the dimensions is individualism versus collectivism. Individualism means that culture emphasizes the individuals own value and decision making. Your own interest goes before the groups or family's interests. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 20.) Everyone is raised to take care of themselves and the family. It is honest and right to let everyone know what you are thinking. (Sinkkonen 2008, 64.) Collectivism is the opposite. In the collectivism cultures the social network, belonging to some group, will shape the individuals identity. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 20.) People are born in big families and to other groups and harmony is maintaining feature. (Sinkkonen 2008, 64).

In collectivist environment students do not speak up in class, not even if the teacher asks some question. If the teacher wants answers he/she needs to point out some student personally to answer. Also students will hesitate to speak in large groups especially if the other group members are not familiar to each other before. Confrontations and conflicts could be better to avoid, so the students will not lose their faces.

In individualist classroom students are more independent and also expect to be treated as individuals. In Individualist classroom there can be more confrontations and open discussion of conflicts. (Hofstede 1991, 61-63).

### 3.1.3 Masculinity versus Femininity

The masculinity is not straight pointed out to the gender but to the features that are often attached to the male gender. Masculinity means hard values like success, competition between individuals. Groups appreciate money and high position. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 20.) The dominant value is material success and development, money and goods are important (Sinkkonen 2008, 66). The cultures which are more feminine, value modesty. Taking care of other people and things that are usually attached to female gender are valued. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 20.) Women are assumed to be more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life, and the men are assumed to be more assertive, tough and focused on material success (Hofstede 1991, 82).

In masculine classroom students want to be seen, they compete more with the other students. In masculine classroom failing is something that will be disaster. In opposite is of course the feminine classroom; students do not want to pop out so much and want to be more equal with the other students, failing in feminine culture is minor thing. (Hofstede 1991, 90-91.)

### 3.1.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance shows how safe the representative of the culture feels him/herself in an uncertain situation (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 20.) Uncertainty avoidance means that how the members of different cultures feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. People need written and unwritten rules; this uncertainty avoidance is expressed through nervous stress in a need for predictability. (Hofstede 1991, 113.) Minor uncertain cultures feel that the uncertainty is normal part in their lives; you can not show your feelings. In strong uncertain cultures the

uncertainty which belongs to the life is continual threat; if you are in suitable situation you can show your feelings. (Sinkkonen 2008, 69-70.)

In strong uncertainty avoidance cultures students think that the teachers are experts and they expect that the teachers have answers to all questions. The opposite is students from the minor uncertainty avoidance cultures. They do not expect so much from the teachers. Students appreciate teachers still if they do not know answers for all things. If teacher says "I do not know" the students will accept it. (Hofstede 1991, 119-120.)

### 3.1.5 Long-Term Orientation

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension theory has got later one more dimension which is long-term orientation. This dimension means the time perception, in the action is there emphasized the long time interval or the short time interval. In long-term orientation people see things far away in the future and opposite people in short-term orientation see things only near in the future. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 20.)

### 3.1.6 Geert Hofstede's Five Cultural Dimensions Compared Finland and People's Republic of China

Finnish and Chinese cultures differ from each other. Geert Hofstede's model shows the differences that the Finnish and Chinese have. It includes all the five elements that are already presented - power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation.

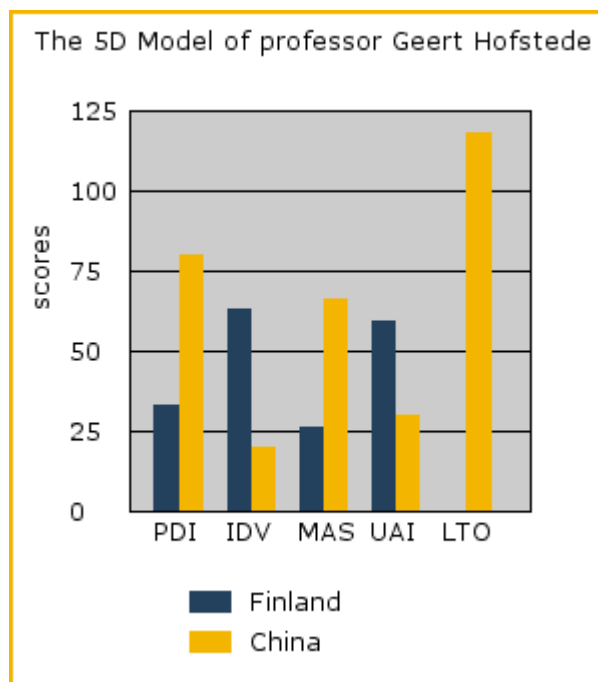


Figure. 4 (Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010.)

PDI – Power Distance Index

IDV - Individualism

MAS – Masculinity

UAI – Uncertainty Avoidance Index

LTO – Long-Term Orientation

This figure 4 shows the differences of the cultural dimensions between Finland and People's Republic of China by Hofstede's theory. The power distance index shows

that people in Finland will more easily approach the boss, but the Chinese has the large power distance, and this means that in China people do not approach so easily or directly the boss. The second index, the individualism, shows that people in Finland are more individual than in China. Chinese are more collectivism which means that they want to belong to some reference group. Finns are more individual they want to do most of the things by themselves. The third index, masculinity, shows that people in Finland are more feminine and Chinese are more masculine. In Finland people are more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life. The Chinese are more assertive, tough and focused on material success. The fourth index, uncertainty avoidance, shows that in Finland there is higher uncertainty avoidance than in PRC. This means that in Finland people feel safer in uncertain situation than the Chinese do. The last one, the long-term orientation shows that in PRC people indicate a society's time perspective and an attitude of persevering; that is, overcoming obstacles with time, if not with will and strength.

### 3.2 Fons Trompenaars's and Charles Hampden-Turner's Theory

This theory is based on fourteen years of research by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner. The theory includes six dimensions which are universalism against particularism, individualism against communitarianism, specificity against diffusion, achieved status against ascribed status, inner direction against outer direction and sequential time against synchronous time. (Hampden-Turner C. & Trompenaars F. 2000, 11.) The research was done to over 15 000 managers from 28 countries (Hoecklin 1994, 40).

#### 3.2.1 Universalism versus Particularism

The first of the six dimensions is universalism versus particularism. "What is more important – rules or relationships?" (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010). Universalism includes rules, codes, laws and generalizations and the particularism includes expectations, special circumstances and unique relations. The common feature for the universalism is that it tries to find sameness and simi-



larity, and tries to set for all people or universe the laws of their mutual feature. The common feature for particularism is that it tries to search differences. For legal and scientific spheres the universalism is very important. For example the law that every citizen should be taken in common and nothing be done to prevent the course of justice. Particularism means that there might be some particular event or a phenomenon which is outside of the scope of any rules. Universalism and particularism defines that which one is most important; rules or relations? (Hampden-Turner C. & Trompenaars F. 2000, 13-15.)

### 3.2.2 Individualism versus Communitarianism

The second dimension is individualism versus communitarianism. “Do we function as a group or as individuals?” (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010). Individualism includes personal freedom, human rights, the rights of the individual and competitiveness. The communitarianism includes social responsibility, harmonious relations, the rights of the group and society and cooperation. Individualism means that people act individual and communitarianism means that people act in groups. (Hampden-Turner C. & Trompenaars F. 2000, 11) (Changing Minds, www-pages, 12.3.2010.)

### 3.2.3 Specificity versus Diffusion

The third dimension is specificity versus diffusion. “How far do we get involved?” (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010.) Specificity defines that how specific some culture is (Hampden-Turner C. & Trompenaars F. 2000, 11, 123). In specific cultures the first thing that people do is that they analyze things first individually and after that put it together. In the specific cultures people concentrate on hard facts, standards and contracts. Diffusely oriented cultures do not see the individual perspective, they see the entity. There are no individuals, but everything is somehow related to one another. (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010.)

### 3.2.4 Achieved Status versus Ascribed Status

The fourth dimension is achieved versus against ascribed status. “Do we have to prove ourselves to receive status or is it given to us?” (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010.) Achieved status means that what you have done. Ascribed status means that who are you, your potential and connections. (Hampden-Turner C. & Trompenaars F. 2000, 11.) Achieved status will be defined by the way what people have accomplished. In ascribed status people will not accomplish their status; it is given them from birth, age, gender or wealth. (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010).

### 3.2.5 Inner Direction versus Outer Direction

The fifth dimension is inner direction versus outer direction. “Do we control our environment or work with it?” In an inner-directed culture, people think that they can control the nature with the right expertise. In an outer directed culture, the way people think is different. They believe that humans are one of the nature’s forces and should work with the nature. (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010.)

### 3.2.6 Sequential Time versus Synchronous Time

The last one, the sixth, dimension is sequential time versus synchronous time. “Do we do things one at a time or several things at once?” (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010). In sequential time, time is a race along a set course. In synchronous time, time is a dance of fine coordination’s (Hampden-Turner C. & Trompenaars F. 2000, 11). In a sequential culture, people do things one at time. In a synchronic time culture, it is the opposite way; people do several things at same time. (Fons Trompenaars Seven Dimensions, www-pages, 13.3.2010.)

## 4 COMPARING THE CULTURES

This part of the thesis includes the culture of People's Republic of China and the Finnish culture. Also in the end of this part the two cultures will be compared to each other.

### 4.1 Culture of People's Republic of China

If you are a foreigner in PRC you will ever be taken as a Chinese. But if you are in PRC it is better to watch what Chinese people do in certain situations, like in social and business situations, and try to behave like the Chinese will. (Mason C. & Murray G. 1999, 23.)

#### 4.1.1 Chinese

Modesty, tolerance, politeness, friendliness, wisdom, patriotic and goodwill are adjectives that describe usually the typical Chinese people. Respect towards the old people and parents are important. Chinese have close relations with family members. Chinese respect the hierarchy. They appreciate services they get. They protest the corruption. Confucianism includes five doctrines. The first one is that you need to maintain different kind of relationships. Second one is that the family is the prototype of the social organizations, we are group members not individuals. The third one is that you need to behave righteously towards other people, no one lose their faces. The fourth is that you need to respect education and diligence. The last, the fifth is that you need to be reasonable in everything, you need to safe, stay calm, need to avoid exaggeration and do not enjoy too much. (Lewis 1996, 243-244.)

#### 4.1.2 Losing Face

Losing face is what Chinese people try to avoid. It also explains many of the Chinese behavior patterns. If someone is laughing it does not always mean that something was funny, Chinese people will laugh if they want to cover up embarrassment in a situation which is awkward. Laughing could tell you that the foreigner has said something that the other person did not understand. Chinese think that impatience is a serious trait mistake. (Mason C. & Murray G., 1999, 24.)

#### 4.1.3 Establishing Relations with Chinese

When you are meeting a Chinese people the safest way is to nod and give a verbal salutation. It is better to follow their lead, watch what the Chinese do and then act like they do. (Dresser 2005, 16.) You need to have patient when speaking with a Chinese, use simply and short sentences. If you think that you have not been understood, then speak slowly than usually. You may need to explain some things differently, so be prepared. (Mason C. & Murray G. 1999, 38.) Teachers are highly respected so students in classroom will not be asking questions so much (Dresser 2005, 41).

The Finnish students who were studying in the People's Republic of China met the local people in the school campus area, restaurant, shops etc. The main problem when establishing relations with the local people was for all the language barrier.

Here are some examples that how the local people react on the Finnish students.

“We were the first exchange students in that school. The local students didn't come close to us easily. We looked different and we were bigger than them and there were six of us so maybe those are the reasons that they didn't have courage to come to talk to us. They were very interested about us but they didn't come to talk to us easily.”

“Depended where I went, but a lot of staring. It was quite hard to have contact with them in general, but there were a few exceptions where some people approached me wanting to make friends with me.”

“The locals were watching and staring. They came to ask if they could take a picture of us etc. Their reactions were always friendly and warm.”

“They were curious to know something about Finland and to use their quite bad English. They were really friendly and helped us when we were in need.”

#### 4.1.4 Gestures and Habits

Smiling in a Chinese way means different things. It can mean disagreement, anger, frustration or confusion. Sign of a respect for a Chinese is to avoid eye contact. If people from same sex are holding hands it is a sign of friendship. Also if the people's arms are linked or if they are walking with arms it also means friendship. If the Chinese is making some eating noises it means that they appreciate the food. (Dresser 2005, 18, 21-22, 81.)

Saying “no” is also considered rude, Chinese will do anything to avoid using straight “no” answer (Dresser 2005, 195). Spitting and belching (especially after a meal) are things that Chinese do and they are not rude, it just something that belongs to their culture (Mason C. & Murray G. 1999, 40).

#### 4.1.5 Beliefs of Colors and Numbers

Most of the Chinese think that if man is wearing a green hat his girlfriend or wife is cheating on him. Green color is associated to wealth; prosperity and harmony, because of the popularity of jade, but the exception in this are green hats associating to unfaithfulness. Lucky colors for Chinese are orange, red and pink. White color is a mourning color in China. Black and white are colors which are associated to death so for example in the wedding female guest should not wear these colors. (Dresser 2005, 63- 67.)

White envelopes are an occasion of death. So if some Chinese gives you a white envelope accept it but open it when you are not with the giver. The opposite is red envelopes. Red color means good luck. If there was money in the envelope it means

two good things, red color – good luck, and money – prosperity. (Dresser 2005, 97, 137.)

Chinese people believe that some certain numbers give you a good or bad luck. Number four is the most negative number because saying number “four” in Chinese languages sounds almost the same as saying word “death” in Chinese. If there is an uneven number of a person in a photo it brings you bad luck. (Dresser 2005, 134-135.)

#### 4.1.6 Gift Giving

Avoid giving umbrellas because the word umbrella in Chinese language means separation. Giving knives or scissors as a gift, it means separation of a relationship for a Chinese. Giving a clock to a Chinese it means ending their relationship. Cash gifts to a Chinese should be given with both hands and the numbers should be in even. Do not expect that the Chinese will open the gift in front of the giver. (Dresser 2005, 96.)

## 4.2 Finnish Culture

People usually think that Finnish people are serious and solemn, but when you get to know some Finn you will find out that they have a great sense of humour. Finland is very industrialized nation and people in Finland usually appreciate punctuality. In Finland there are two official languages, Finnish and Sweden. Because of the Finnish history the Finnish culture is mixture of European, Scandinavian and Russian cultures. (Swallow 2008, preface, 57.)

### 4.2.1 Finns

Civilized, humble, calmness and obedient adjectives describes in a good way Finnish people and the whole country. People in Finland are very proud of their environment. The reason that Finns are so patriotic and proud perhaps comes from the fact that they have been for almost seven centuries under Swedish rule and for over a century

under Russian rule. (Swallow 2008, 3, 12, 26.) There are over five million inhabitants in Finland and they are speaking very rare language. Finnish people are also very keen to sauna and sports. (Kolbe 2005, 34.)

Eye contact might be some thing that it is hard to get with a Finnish people. Finns do not easily get eye contact with some other person or say opinions about some other person's appearance. (Swallow 2008, 93.) People do not greet strangers and Finns hate small talk. It is rare for Finn to interrupt someone. (Schatz 2005, 13.)

Finns do not like to think that they are Scandinavian and also they do not like to admit that they have been sometimes under the Russian rule. Finns are proud of their country and have strong national identity. Finns are also well educated and they have high technology. Finns look often very similar and the dress code for them is very casual, they do not like to stand out in a crowd. Finns disagree with this and they think that they are very individualistic. (Swallow 2008, 5, 26, 59-60, 79-80, 92-93.)

#### 4.2.2 Sisu

Finland as a country is very young. The country has been declared independent republic on 6<sup>th</sup> of December in 1917. People in Finland are proud of the country and very patriotic. Before the independency they have been under Swedish rule for 600 years and under Russian rule from 1809 to 1917 (Zetterberg 2005, 11). They struggle of the independency for years and won the independency.

The trait which describes the Finns is called "sisu" or in English guts. Sisu means that Finns will not give up, they stay tough in any situations (Schatz 2005, 25). They will continue defeat even if all looks lost. Sisu is character that is central to their being and being independent country and personality, (Swallow 2008, 59)., and they are very proud of it (Schatz 2005, 25.) Without a sisu Finland might still be under some other country's rule. (Swallow 2008, 59.)

#### 4.2.3 Establishing Relations with Finns

Foreign people who do not know Finnish people so well might believe that Finns are slow and silent people. Actually Finns are very modern people. Do not ever brag about anything with Finns. They always say what they want to say and nothing else. When you say something do not always wait any feedback, they just believe what you say and that's it. Take the silence as a positive sign, and then you are able to relax. Always set clear goals, define aims, trust the individuals and always carry responsibility of your tasks. Show to the Finnish people that you are interested about their culture. (Lewis 1996, 278-280.)

#### 4.2.4 Gestures and Habits

People in Finland are shy of unfamiliar situations and new things. In Finland's society everyone are equal and every person has to be threaten righteous. When you first met Finnish people they might seem to be quiet and rude. They say things straight and honest. A Finnish person gives space to other people. (Infopankki, www-pages, 25.5.2010).

People in Finland have a personal space, comfort zone, and they think that it is a right for them, not privilege. Finns do not small talk; they only speak when they have something to say. They appreciate silence and do not get uncomfortable if there are gaps in the conversation. If you are asking a question for the Finn, he/she will answer with minimal information. (Swallow 2008, 71-72, 102, 262-264.)

### 4.3 Comparing Cultures of Finland and People's Republic of China

PRC is the populous country and also they have the oldest civilization. Westerners consider PRC to be as a developing country because the technology is primitive, infrastructure is undeveloped, the hygiene is poor, the pollution and the politics, but people are wrong. Although of all PRC has a huge impact to their neighbours and also to the whole world (Lewis 1996, 241). This is different in Finland. It is small and young country (Swallow 2008, 26).



People are more superstitious in PRC when compared to Finnish people. Both of them are shy in their own way. But the Chinese like to be with many people, they are more like group people than Finnish. In Finland people are more independent and like to be sometimes alone.

Chinese and Finnish people have some common features also. Chinese people value their own personal territory and because of that wants to keep some space between the other partner. Chinese people also tolerate silence like Finnish. Both appreciate patience, because things always happen somehow. The business relations are built in trust in both cultures. (Salminen K. & Poutanen P. 1996, 59-60.)

Here are some examples of the cultural differences that the students have when they were studying in the People's Republic of China.

“People were friendly but also very shy. Many times I saw that they would like to make contact but they were like a bit afraid. Of course the language problem from both sides didn't make it any easier. Also the closing times were flexible and many little shops were open always. Smoking inside the shops and taxis surprised sometimes.”

“The manners are really different. In the big scale everybody is thinking about themselves, for example in the traffic. But in the small scale everybody is really friendly and if you need help you will get it.”

“Hierarchy is something that I couldn't expect so much.”

“A lot of; the way of thinking is totally different as well as the way of doing things. Chinese people are not logical by the Finnish norms and also they need more people (perhaps a triple) to do same task as in Finland one person does it. There are the “main” differences. Even though at first they seem not so good, but in the end the whole society is totally different than ours.”

## 5 RESEARCH

This is the empirical part of the thesis. This thesis is about People's Republic of China and Finnish culture. The main topic is that how the Finnish exchange students experienced culture shock in PRC. The questionnaire was sent through email to Finnish students who have been in an exchange in PRC. Ten answers were returned, six of the interviewees were women and four of them were men. The average age of the interviewees was 23. Four of them studied in the same school, at Shanghai University, and other four in Jiangsu Polytechnic University and two of them in some other school. Almost everyone studied in the host country Chinese language and culture. Most of the interviewees stayed in the People's Republic of China 4 to 6 months.

### 5.1 Background of the Research

Research method in this thesis was semi-structured interview by a questionnaire. The interview was sent to the potential interviewees through the email. It included 44 questions. There were different categories:

- Background information
- Chinese language skills
- Studies in the host country
- Basic information
- Travelling/traffic
- Social relationships and spare time
- Cultural differences
- Experiences after the exchange period (back in your home country).

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by conducting the research according to research ethics. Some of the questions were multiple choice questions but in every question the answerer had an opportunity to use his/her own words.

## 5.2 Semi-Structured Theme Interview

The questionnaire was semi-structured theme interview. (Hirsijärvi S. & Hurme H. 2008, 48, (Patton 1990, 280.) The semi-structured theme interview means that questions that was used is for all the interviewees the same but there is no specific answer alternatives, in every question the interviewees could use their own words. (Hirsijärvi S. & Hurme H. 2008, 48.)

The benefits of the semi-structured interview are for example the answers will be relevant, the interviewees are specially targeted and the interviewees have more freedom to say their opinions. The disadvantages of using the semi-structured interview are for example; interviewees has to be enough to get enough answers, preparing needs to done carefully so the questions do not lead or prescriptive and the questions has to be confidential. (Methodologies - Interviews, www-pages, 1.5.2010.)

## 5.3 Research Analysis Compared to Theories

This part of the thesis analyzes the questionnaire and compares it to two theories which have seen before. The theories are the Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and the Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner Six Cultural Dimensions. In the end of every analyzing part there will be shown few examples of the answers I got from the interviewees.

In PRC the power distance is higher than in Finland. You can see it from the differences of the teaching methods. In Finland you can better interact in the classroom, in PRC, quote one of the answer "Teacher is superior and students do not really question is the teacher right or wrong." The school in PRC was much more like an elementary school. Interviewees did not have exams or much homework. Teachers repeated things more.

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the theory of the individualism against collectivism. Finnish students are more independent than Chinese students. This you can

see from the differences of the studies. Finnish student gets more homework and they need to be more independent in classes and especially outside the school. The teachers in PRC told almost every time that when the students need to take notes. In Finland students takes notes if they want, teachers do not tell them that when they need to take notes.

“University was like elementary school; a great disappointment. Also methods were different; no exams, no essays etc. But I assume it was only for us (exchange students). “

“In China when teacher wrote things to blackboard or showed power points or something he/she told the students what they should write down. I got the feeling that the teacher has to always say what the students should do.”

“In Finland we do more work outside the class. And we have more material in one course. In China there is always one book in a one course. We might have many books and articles in Finland. In Finland we also have more internet courses in Moodle. In general students are more independent in Finland.”

Uncertainty avoidance is higher in People’s Republic of China than in Finland. Chinese people are more uncertain in situations at school, teachers do not know all the things, mainly the things that they have in their slides. In the classroom in Finland there is more interaction and the teachers also need to know more than only things that are shown in the slides.

“The professor was reading straight from this note (the same notes that we had) and a interpreter translated it into English. Almost none individual or group works. We had a test for Chinese language, but for everything else we only needed to write an essay to be evaluated.”

“In Finland a student is more active and there is a bit more interaction between professor and students. When it comes to language studies, grammar is more important in language studies in Finland.”

Like this thesis already has mention in the Hofstede's theory analysis that Finnish students are more independent. We can use the same answer in this theory also. Because Finnish students get more homework and need to be more independent also outside the school we can say that Finnish students are more independent than Chinese students.

“In Finland we have to do a lot more work to get our academic credits.”

#### 5.4 Research Analysis

This part will analyze the relevant answers which have got from the interviewees. In every analyzing part there will be summary of the answers and in some parts there will be shown straight answer example.

If people want to lower the risk of experiencing culture shock one helpful thing is that you can learn about the culture you are going. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 57). All of the interviewees have some kind of information before the exchange and that helped them to adapt to the new country better. The interviewees got information for example from the internet, asking for other people, reading news, learned at school and from the guidebooks. The information that people got was some basic information like about the culture, food, business, studies, accommodation etc. The more you know things before you are going in to the new environment, the easier the adaptation will be. Because most of the interviewees knew things before they did not feel so huge culture shock symptoms.

The typical culture shock symptoms are insomnia, tiredness, loneliness, anger, insecurity, fear, lack of appetite, suffering from the lack of working power and quality, increased use of alcohol and drugs or suffer from low-self-esteem. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 56.) Also people might feel homesick, problems with the language, depression or desperation. Sometimes people do not feel any kind of culture shock. The reason why people do not suffer from the culture shock might be that they have prepared well and before the exchange searched information and learned about the country. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 57.)

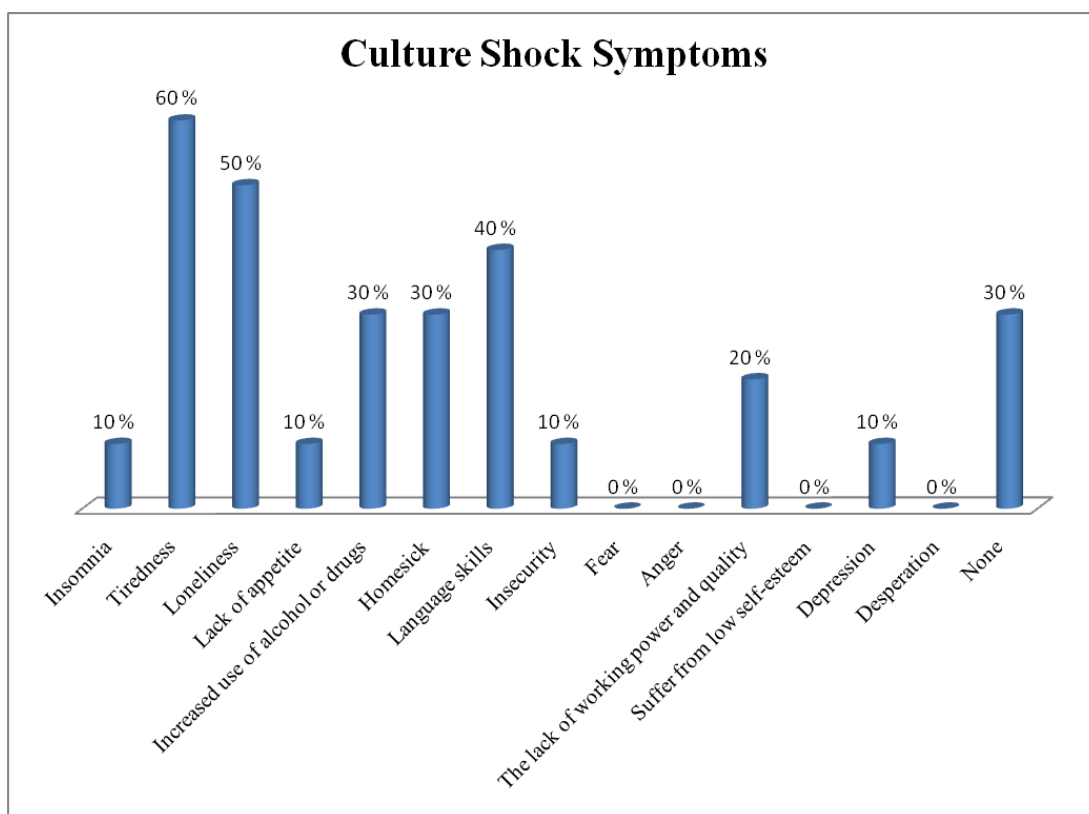


Figure 5. Culture Shock Symptoms

Figure 5 shows what kind of culture shock symptoms are. The bars show that how many percents of the interviewees suffered from which of the symptoms. For example 60 % of the interviewees suffered tiredness during their exchange period. 30 percent of the interviewees did not feel any kind of culture shock symptoms. Three main culture shock symptoms which the interviewees experienced were tiredness, loneliness and language skills. In new country and culture there is always something to learn because everything is new, also the time-lag affects to the tiredness. Even though most of the interviewees got some other exchange students near they still felt loneliness, which might be because they missed their family and other friends and normal routines were gone.

Language is one of the things that separate different cultures from each other. If your language skills are poor it might cause you some kind of misunderstandings. The best way to react on the language problems is by humor. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 44-51.) More than half had studied Chinese before and for all of them the level of the

studies was basic. The situations where the interviewees used Chinese were in everyday life like in restaurants, shops, taxis and classes. The problems occurred with pronunciation and characters. Some did have misunderstandings for example, people thought that if they knew something in Chinese they knew all and just started to speak very fast and lot. But most of the cases the interviewees got through the situations by humor.

Mind affects on the way you experience culture shock. It will be harder to adapt to new culture if person thinks that only his/her own culture is the right one. All of the interviewees did not have this kind of problems. They were well prepared and they wanted to learn new things about the new culture.

This thesis has focused on the Chinese culture and Finnish culture and the differences these cultures has. In the questionnaire one of the questions was that "What kind of problems did you have with the cultural differences". Some said that it was hard to understand things that the Chinese did so differently than Finnish does. Some had communication problems and some did not experience any kind of problems with the cultural differences. Cultural differences have an impact to the way some one will experience the culture shock. If you do not understand the way why people behave or act so differently in some situations, you will feel some kind of shock. Chinese and Finnish culture differs from each other much. So experiencing some cultural differences will be normal thing. The best way to survive from the cultural differences is to act like the local people would act.

Reverse shock means that someone who had spent long period in foreign country and then return to home will experience some adaptation problems. Something might have changed in your home country. This might be harder than the adaptation to the new country. (Frisk O. & Tolkki H. 2005, 57) Most of the interviewees suffered from the return shock but maybe did not realize it. You did not do things what you did in People's Republic of China, normal daily things was different. Most of the interviewees did not feel that something has changed in the home country, for some there has been some small changes, but did not affect them so much.

Only few of the interviewees thought that Finland is not their home anymore and the rest of the interviewees thought that Finland will always be their home. All was thinking that they want to see the world, experience more and travel more. Also for most of the interviewees the adaptation for the new country was easier than coming back to the home country. These two things shows that almost for all the exchange period was an exciting and good experience and because of this they did not feel so remarkable culture shock or reverse shock.

## 6 SUGGESTIONS FOR TONING THE CULTURE SHOCK DOWN

Culture shock is thing that person who is spending time in foreign culture might experience. Some might not experience any kind of symptoms but some might experience them all. It depends on the way you adapt to the new environment and the new cultural differences. People experience culture shock differently.

When person is entering in to a new country important thing is to learn things about the new country before the entering. Person can find information about the country where he/she is going from internet, guide books and ask information from people who have been there before. For me the most helpful thing was that I knew a lot of things about PRC before the exchange. We had a few seminars about PRC and exchange and I also did a country report of PRC.

When entering in to the new country first thing to do is to find some new friends so person will not feel loneliness. I was exchange student in PRC and my biggest help there was that I had five other Finnish students around me all the time. We spent the most of the time together and experienced all the new things together, so that helped my adaptation.

When person is meeting local people it is better to do things like they do, so you do not lose your face or someone else loses his/her face. For Chinese people losing face means that someone does something that will embarrass you, or the person himself



does something that will embarrass himself. So it is important to remember to behave more like the local people do than like you would do in your home country.

Culture shock includes four steps: honeymoon period, frustration (culture shock), accepting/adjustment and the adaptation/mastery. In the honeymoon period the person is excited about new things. In this first step person needs to remember that there is also things that might not be so fascinating. The second step, when usually the culture shock starts, is the frustration. Now the person only sees the disgusting things of the culture. Lowering the culture shock person could combine these two steps, tries to enjoy about the fascinating things but also accept the disgusting things.

The third step is the most important step. Person needs to accept all things, whether they are good or bad things. If that step is not happening then the person can not enjoy the living in a new culture. The final step is the adaptation. Person feels like he/she is at home and belongs to the new culture. So try to remember that every culture differs from your own culture and take all new things as open-minded.

Stereotypes are things that might affect on the way person will experience culture shock. Stereotypes means that person, usually group, have some expectations of some other group. It is important to remember that in most of the cases the stereotypes are not real. So when person is going in to a new country he/she has to remember that if he/she has some stereotypes of that group they are not usually real.

Gestures and habits are features that are common for people who share the same culture. Every culture has their own gestures and habits; they might differ a lot from your own culture. It is important to be open-minded and take the new things in a positive way. For example smiling in a Finnish way usually means that the person is happy, but smiling in a Chinese culture could mean disagreement, anger, frustration or confusion.

Because Chinese- and Finnish cultures differs from each other a lot, it is normal to experience culture shock whether you are Finnish student in PRC or Chinese student in Finland. When a Chinese student is coming to study in Finland he/she might experience culture shock. The shock could come from different things. For example the price level in Finland is much higher than in PRC. Also people are more independent

and likes to be sometimes alone, Chinese people usually goes everywhere as a group. Teaching methods are different, in Finland you need to be more independent. Also one thing that might cause culture shock for Chinese students in Finland is that people in Finland only speaks when they have something to say, the silence might mean for the Chinese that something is wrong. When person is going in to a new culture he/she needs to prepare well enough because things are different in every culture. It would be interesting to see that what kind of answers would come if someone would do this thesis as an opposite way; how Chinese students experienced culture shock in Finland. This kind of thesis would help Chinese students to adapt easier to the new country and culture and that is why they would enjoy the experience more.

Tips for the exchange student for lowering the culture shock; search information before the exchange, try to meet local people and learn things about their culture. Try to enjoy all things, whether they are good or bad things. The most important thing is to be open-minded. When you are in a situation that is a weird try to get over it by humor.

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**How did you experience culture shock while you were studying in People's Republic of China?**

This is questionnaire for my bachelor's thesis. My topic is **How Finnish Exchange Students Experience Culture Shock in People's Republic of China.**

Your answers are confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. I will make a conclusion of all the answers I get. You can put it in your own words in most of the question and please use as many words as possible. The results of this research will be presented as generalized conclusions and discussion.

Be prepared that this might take about 30 minutes!

Thank you for your time!! 😊

## Background Information

1. Gender Male  Female
2. Age
3. Where did you study in People's Republic of China?  
 Jiangsu Polytechnic University                       Shanghai University  
 Some Other, Which?
4. What did you study in your exchange school?
5. How long did you stayed in the host country?  
 4 to 6 months                       6 to 8 months                       8 to 12 months  
 More, how long?
6. Why did you choose People's Republic of China to be your exchange country?
7. What has been the most enjoyable feature in your host country?
8. Did you have some problems of taking care the practical things or getting knows the host country's university?  Yes                       No
9. If you answered "Yes" in the previous question, what were the things that you had problems with?  
 Enrolment     Getting to know the campus area                        
Apartment     Eating                       Bank  
 Some other, what
10. Describe problematic situations

### **Chinese Language Skills**

11. Estimate your Chinese language skills before the exchange

Fluent       Good       Satisfying       Basic       None

12. How were the language studies in People's Republic of China?

13. In what kind of situations you use Chinese language?

14. What kind of problems did you have with the Chinese language?

15. Which language you used more, Chinese or English?

### **Studies In The Host Country**

16. What kind of information you got about the People's Republic of China before the exchange?

17. What was different compared to Finnish teaching methods?

18. What was different compared to your studies in Finland?

19. What kind of problems you have with the teaching methods in the host country?

20. What kind of problems you have with your studies in the host country?

### Basic Information

21. In what kind of situations did you experience communication problems?

- |                                                                 |                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cafeteria/Restaurant/School Restaurant | <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing stores    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Post office        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hairdresser<br>chine)                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Bank/ATM (cash ma- |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grocery shop                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Some other, Where? |

22. How did you manage to deal with the problems?

23. What kind of accommodation you have?

24. Give some examples of the price level in the People's Republic of China?

25. How different the food was compared to your own country, Finland?

26. What kind of weather there was in the host country?

### Travelling/Traffic

27. What kind of transportation you usually used when travelling in the host country?

- Car     Train     Taxi     Bus     Bicycle     By foot
- Some other, what?

28. Did you travel in the host country, where?

29. What kind of problems did you experience with the travelling in the host country?

30. What kind of problems did you experience with the traffic in the host country?



### **Social Relationships and Spare Time**

31. In what kind of situations did you meet local people?

32. What kind of problems did you meet when communicating with the local people?

33. What kind of hobbies you got? How and where?

34. How did you spend your spare time/holidays/weekends?

35. How did the local people and the school people react to you?

## Cultural Differences

36. What kind of cultural differences did you experience?

37. What kind of problems did you have with the cultural differences?

38. Did you experience something (critical incidents) that you realized after the situation that you have shattered some cultural norm? What and how?

39. Did you have any stereotypes from the host country's people? Were the stereotypes right or wrong?

40. Did you suffer from the typical culture shock symptoms?

Insomnia

Insecurity

Tiredness

Fear

Loneliness

Anger

Lack of appetite  
and quality

The lack of working power

Increased use of alcohol or drugs

Suffer from low self-esteem

Homesick

Depression

Language skills

Desperation

Other? What?

Please tell about the symptoms in your own words

### **Experiences After the Exchange Period, Back in Your Home Country**

41. Did you experience some kind of shock when you returned in your home country?  
What kind of shock?
  
42. Was something changed in your home country while you were away?
  
43. After your exchange period, did you feel that your home country still is your home?  
For example did you feel like you want to leave from Finland again soon?
  
44. Was the adaptation for the new country and culture easier or harder than coming back to your home country?

**When you have finished all the questions please save the file as Word 97 – 2003 document and then send it back to my email, [annemari.kiskola@student.samk.fi](mailto:annemari.kiskola@student.samk.fi).**

**Thank you for your time! When I have gathered all the answers together I will send the summary to you by email.**