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THE ADJUSTMENT PROCESS OF ASIAN EXPATRIATE
STUDENTS

Degree Programme in International Business
and Marketing Logistics

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ABSTRACT

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Key words: expatriate, asian expatriate, culture, cultural differences, adjustment process, culture shock.

The purpose of this study was threefold. First issue was to find out what kind of problems Asian expatriate students face while studying in Finland. Secondly, to give Asian expatriates an idea how to prepare beforehand and what kind of problems one is likely to face. Third purpose was to give the university an idea how their current Asian expatriate students are doing in general, and to give advice on how they can help their Asian expatriate students even more than they already do.

The first part of the thesis discusses cultural issues from many different perspectives. It examines differentiation of cultures, Hofstede's four dimensions, how to cross cultures successfully, cultural differences, cultural adaptability, and culture shock. The research material was collected by nine personal interviews with pre-planned questionnaire. All of the nine respondents were at the time of research studying in Satakunta University of Applied sciences.

The interview material was analyzed with research problems in mind, and after analysis all of the research problems were more or less answered. The study was able to determine the main challenges Asian expatriate students face in Finland. Main problems were caused by the very different character of Finnish people compared to Asians. There are also some customs Finnish people have which were causing trouble among the Asian expatriates, main one being the usage of alcohol. After analyzing the answers a few recommendations were made both to the future expatriates and to the university as well.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Satakunta University of applied sciences has quite a few students from all over Asia to study in the Degree Programme in International Business and Marketing Logistics. Cultural differences between Asia and Finland are very well known and this is acknowledged by the staff in SAMK. There is, however, no study done about how well the Asian expatriates adjust in the Finnish way of life. Jumping from familiar world into a totally different one is more often than not going to cause some struggles. I wanted to find out what kind of struggles Asian expatriates go through while they try to adjust into the Finnish way of life, and that is the core of this study.

There are 21 Asian expatriate students altogether studying in Degree Programme in international business and marketing logistics. This number has been growing during the last few years and because of my interest in different cultures and because I felt like this might give guidance to future expatriates I decided to write my thesis about this topic. Hopefully this thesis can describe the lives of Asian expatriates well enough to give an idea to the university on how well their foreign students are doing in general.

Cultural differences are challenges for anyone who jumps from one culture to another, but the difference between Asia and Finland is so drastic it's nearly impossible to emigrate without difficulties. There are lots of tangible differences which are easy to notice, and for most people these issues don't cause too much trouble. But the intangible differences like beliefs, values, Finnish traditions, and the way of seeing the world in general are issues which can cause some struggles. It's very common to have struggle, and I hope this study can help someone's burden on their way to adaptation.

2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to find out the main problems Asian expatriate students face during their adaptation process in Finland. The goal is to help future expatriates and give them an idea of the problems and obstacles they are likely to encounter. In addition, Satakunta University of applied sciences will get a better understanding of the problems their expatriate students are struggling with and are able to give them the support they need. Better information about issues to concentrate on prior to arrival can be given to elected students.

2.1 Research Problems

Asian Expatriate students often face some kind of problems during their studies in Finland, but due to cultural differences the issues might not always surface and they are not acknowledged. Therefore the main research problems for this study are: To better understand the problems Asian expatriate students may encounter in their studies or in their everyday life, and to find a way to give them guidance to avoid these problems or solve them in case they face problems anyway. Another research problem is to find out whether faced problems were unforeseeable or if those problems could have been avoided somehow, with better preparation by the student for example.

2.2 Research Objectives

The following research objectives were drawn from the above mentioned research problems:

- *What are the main challenges Asian expatriate students face when moving to Finland?*
- *What kind of everyday challenges Asian expatriate students may encounter?*
- *How could earlier expatriate students help and support newcomers?*
- *How could the expatriates prepare upon arriving to Finland?*
- *How could the university support Asian expatriates even more than they already do?*

- *How to face, and deal with potential culture-shock?*

2.3 The Conceptual Framework

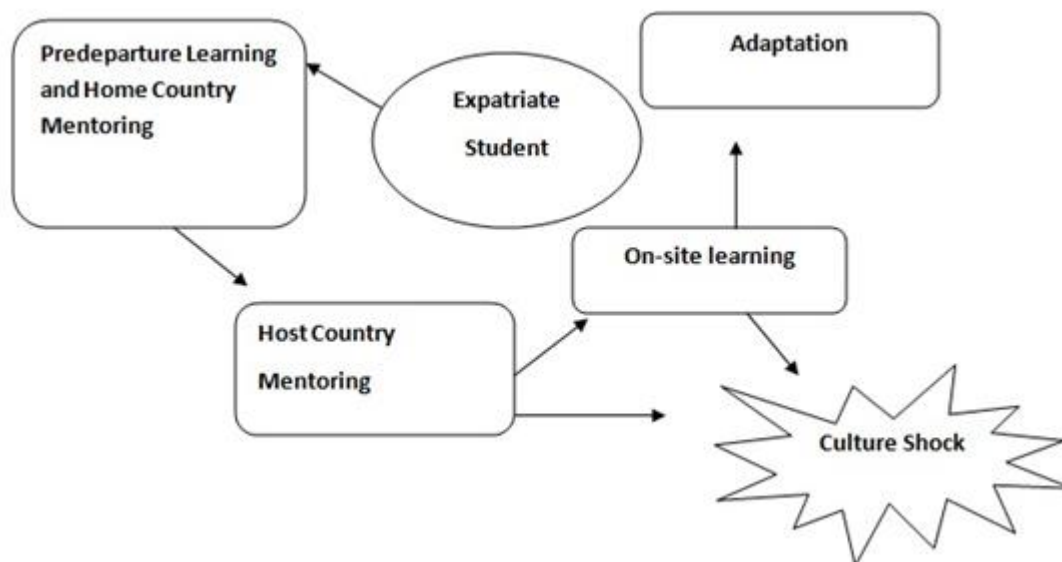


Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework. (Modified from picture in article: “Global mentoring as a means of career development and knowledge creation”)

The figure above shows the cycle of Asian expatriate students which is the target group of this thesis. It starts from the person deciding to become an expatriate, and starting to plan and get ready in one’s home country. Upon arriving to the host country they begin to adjust, and whether they get help from anyone or not can be vital to their future well-being. Somewhere along the way encountering culture shock is inevitable, but how it manifests is another issues altogether. After arrival the process of on-site learning begins. On-site learning means everything from going to university and learning from fellow students, to dealing with people during normal daily routines. On-site learning will hopefully lead into adaptation to the host-country’s culture so that one is able to live normal decent life without complications.

3 EXPATRIATISM

An expatriate is a person temporarily or permanently residing in a country and culture other than that of the person's upbringing or legal residence. In its broadest sense, an expatriate is any person living in a different country from where he or she is a citizen in. (Human Resource Certification institute, 2008)

3.1 Problems faced by expatriates

Expatriates moving countries are faced with a wide range of challenges, including the move itself, the search for accommodation and the integration into a new society. Though the move to a new country might seem a great experience at first, many expatriates have a hard time getting things done in the beginning adapting to their new life abroad. The most common problems faced by expatriates include: Learning the local language, Finding a place to live, making new friends, sorting out finances and healthcare. (HSBC Expat Explorer Survey, 2008)

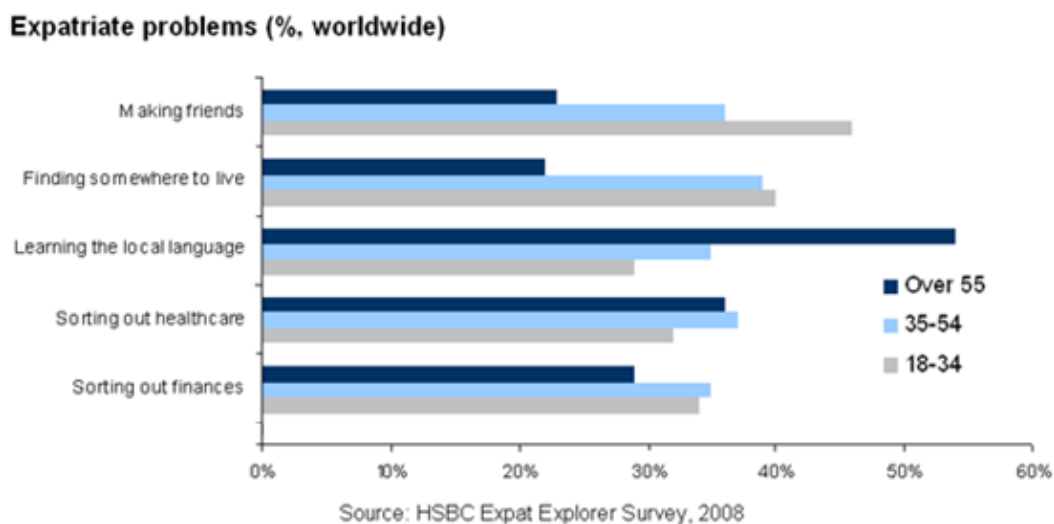


Figure 2 - Expatriate problems (% worldwide)
(HSBC Expat Explorer Survey, 2008)

3.2 Expatriate integration abroad

According to HSBC Expat Explorer survey there are differences between different countries when it comes to making new friends and adapting to the local culture. All experiences are unique and the survey and actual perception of the situation might be very different.

Although socializing with other expatriates partially compensates the lack of local friendships, it certainly doesn't ease integration in the local society and often gives the impression that expatriates are 'not interested in integrating' or 'prefer their own social circles'. That being said, many expatriates tend to make friends with other expatriates in the country they live in. (HSBC Expat Explorer Survey, 2008)

3.3 Getting information and support

The adventure is about to begin and one gets ready for excitement, travel, adventure, and all the work of preparing, moving, settling in, and adjusting. Whether one is an experienced expatriate or a first timer, every move begins in the same way: gathering information about new assignment and finding the support that one needs.

One should not underestimate the importance of preparation. It helps to avoid mistakes and unpleasant surprises, gives an idea of what to expect and what to bring on the journey, reduces the early period of helplessness, and tempers the severity of culture shock. With good preparation one will feel more confident and be able to settle in more quickly. (Hess & Linderman 2002, 7-9)

3.4 Getting started: The basics

When one is about to become an expatriate and is going to leave everything that is familiar and safe there has to be some advanced planning. Without careful deliberation one can easily overlook some issues. The following list gives guidelines into what kind of issues one has to think about prior to the actual move.

According to Hess & Linderman, the Following things are needed prior to the move:

- Information on passports, Visas, and other possible requirements
- Support in moving belongings
- A head start to learning the language and culture in the country of assignment
- Specific university related information
- Information about the support in obtaining overseas housing
- Specific information on living conditions in the host country.
- Tax, Financial, and insurance advice
- One or more tutors in the target country to help get settled during the early weeks

Expatriate students are not sent to the target country by anyone, and therefore they don't have an organization behind them to help them ease the move. They have a school in the target country in which to depend on, but in the beginning of the semester there is a lot of hassle and the help they are able to provide might be limited. Therefore it is important to find out exactly what kind of help one is able to get, so there won't be any ugly surprises abroad. Where can one find a place to live? Will the host school help finding an apartment or house, or is one expected to find a place on their own? It is in ones best interest, to have a clear understanding of the kind of support that will be provided and what one has to take care on their own. Taking the time to find out how to get the support one needs ultimately lessens the stress and eases transition process into a new culture. On arrival, the expatriate community in the host country can be an excellent source of help. They know what new expatriates are going through, and will be sympathetic to ones situation. After arrival one should start building a support network. It takes time, but this effort will pay off. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 42-45)

Finding a local person to assist on arrival is a good idea, especially if one doesn't speak the language. This person can serve as interpreter, assist in finding a place to live, show around shopping centers, and help one get other necessary errands done, banking for example. Finding this kind of support can be difficult though, and one has to be aware of the fact beforehand and have some kind of idea how to solve these

problems. It's better to be overly prepared than find oneself in a predicament and not knowing how to solve it. (Hess & Linderman 2002, 34-35)

4 CULTURE

It is very difficult to find or give only one definition of the term culture. Many definitions have been formulated for culture; it is unclear and abstract notion. Mostly in anthropologic literature but also in economic literature, many different definitions of culture can be found.

Hofstede has defined culture as being "the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category from another" Moreover according to him, "culture is learned, it derives from one's social environment; it is not inherited. The sources of one's mental program lie within the social environments in which one grew up and collected one's life experience." (Hofstede 1980, 21)

Another definition of the term has been given by Hampden-Turner as "Culture comes from within people and is put together by them to reward the capacity that they have in common" Moreover he stresses that culture give continuity and identity to the group. It works as a pattern of information and can greatly facilitate the exchange of understanding. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, p21)

Many different definitions of culture all agree on the fact that culture comes within people and is not inherited, and that it can be learned. Understanding small nuances of any given culture can be harder to grasp though. To be able to understand it completely one has to have grown up in that particular social environment. Having basic understanding of a culture is helpful when interacting with people from that particular culture. Reading about a culture one is about to enter helps but there will be surprises and learning it on the go is the best way to get acquainted with any given culture. . (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, p22-23)

4.1 Differentiation of cultures

As humans, we are born not only into culture, but also into a particular culture: we are given a set of culturally specific defining features into which we are expected to fit or to which we are expected to adapt ourselves. More accurately, we are born into several cultures, each of which acts upon us in different ways, expecting different things from us and making different demands to which we are forced to respond. Moreover, such demands, and the extent to which we are constrained – or, on the other hand, inclined – to accept them, vary enormously in their intensity and insistence, to the extent that we must constantly weigh up the ones to which we will give priority. In many we have little or no choice: sex, race, nationality, is given to us at birth and we ignore at our peril the imperatives they place upon us. (Richardson 2001, 21)

Cultural difference remains a mystery, something that once more seems to separate us from other animals. How do we explain it? Other species appear homogeneous: they do not separate into different groups who may establish a hostile relationship to one another. Humans are a restless species, endlessly seeking to extend their domain and constructing different cultural patterns wherever they go. And each community they form establishes different norms of judgment that may be incompatible with those of other, neighboring, communities. Why should the diffusion of humans lead to the establishment of so many different cultures differentiated in such stark ways? Why should human beings need to belong to societies at all or identify with abstract entities like tribes and nationalities? Cultural factors clearly act in such a way as to affect the aspirations and assumptions of different cultural groups in different ways. A will towards differentiation is central to human culture: we define ourselves not only by what we are, but also by what we are not. And a double movement is necessary to affect this: we must establish ourselves as social beings while at the same time maintaining a sense of ourselves as individual entities separable from – although dependent upon – society. (Richardson 2001, 21-22)

Even though we must fit in the needs of society, we also seek and need to establish a sense of being individuals, both in our own right, but also in relation to the cultural formation of which we are a part of. Individuation is based on the fact that we want

to be like others while simultaneously wanting to be different from them. We want to fit in with the group and at the same time we feel the need to be individuals in our own right. (Richardson 2001, 22)

5 HOFSTEDE'S FOUR DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

Hofstede's work is undoubtedly the most exhaustive cross-cultural study to date, and one of the most widely used among management and marketing scholars. Hofstede identified four dimensions of national culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity and individualism/collectivism. Although these dimensions are independent statistically and occur in all possible combinations, some combinations are more common than others. For example, Eastern cultures tend to score higher in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, are collectivist, possess more feminine values, and are of a long-term orientation. In contrast, Western cultures tend to be characterized by lower power distance and uncertainty avoidance, are more individualistic, possess more masculine qualities, and have a short-term orientation (Leo, Bennet & Härtel 2005, 34-36)

Hofstede's cultural dimensions vary greatly between Asian countries and Finland. Understanding what each dimension means, and knowing the difference between expatriates host country and Finland is of great importance.

5.1 Power Distance

In Hofstede's words, "Power distance is the degree in which the less powerful members of an organization accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 1991). In high power distance countries, people accept that their superiors - meaning parents, teachers, bosses, or people that are older - have more power. One does not argue with parents. It is not appropriate to answer back in class for the sake of airing one's opinion. It doesn't however mean one cannot give opinions, but it is to be done in respectful and sometimes indirect way.

Small power distance societies	Large power distance societies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers respect the independence of his/her students • Students' initiative is considered very important • Students initiate communication • Teachers expect students to find their own way • Students are encouraged to speak up spontaneously • Students are allowed to express their own opinion • Effective learning depends on two-way communication in class • In conflicts between teacher and student, parents take the student's side • Teachers are treated as equals outside class • Young teachers are more liked than older ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students respect their teachers • Order in class is very important • Students wait for the teacher to initiate communication • Students expect teacher to show them paths to follow • Students speak up only when asked by the teacher • Students always accept what teacher says • Effective learning is a result of excellence of the teacher • In conflicts between teacher and student, parents take teacher's side • Teachers are respected also outside class • Old teachers are more respected than younger ones

Figure 3 – Power Distance

This table illustrates the differences between small power distance societies, and large power distance societies.

(Power distance: dimension and methodology, 2001)

Finland scores 33 in Power distance, which is quite a small number compared to the rest of the world. There is a great difference in Power distance between Finland and Asia since the average score for Asian countries is 71. Finland can be seen as a country with small power distance, and Asian countries in general have large power distance. This is something Asian expatriates should really keep in mind when coming to Finland and know in advance the differences between small and large power distance countries.

5.2 Individualism

In an individualistic society, the ties between individuals are loose. You are mainly responsible for yourself, and for your direct, nuclear family. In Collective societies

however, people are part of close groups since birth. One is responsible for its group. The groups provide protection in return for unconditional loyalty. In individualistic cultures, children grow up in small nuclear families, with one or both parents and one or two brothers or sisters. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins live at a distance, and contact with them is not on a regular basis. One learns to be “I” oriented. The aim of individualistic upbringing is to make one independent. In fact, independence is one the highest individualistic virtues. In collective cultures children grow up in large families, sometimes in extended families, including grandparents or other family members. One is rarely alone. Children automatically learn to be “we” oriented, and ones identity is in the group identity. The aim of collective upbringing is to help one become a responsible member of the group. To be “interdependent” and to care for other group members are great virtues. (Nunez 2007, 48)

Low Individualism	High Individualism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We” consciousness • Collectivity orientation • Identity is based on social system • People have large families and take care of people around them • Diplomas and degrees are the way to higher posts and higher social levels • Belief in group decision • Private life is invaded by organizations and clans to which one belongs; opinions are predetermined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I” consciousness • Self-orientation • Identity is based in the individual • People learn to take care of themselves and closest family • Diplomas and degrees make the person more valuable both financially and as for self-esteem • Belief in individual decisions • Everyone has a right on a private life and opinion.

Figure 4 - Individualism

This table illustrates the difference between Low and High Individualism societies (Cultural dimensions, 2001)

Finland scores 63 in Individualism and can be seen as country which fits into “high individualism” society. Asia’s average however is only 23 and therefore most Asian countries are clearly collectivist countries, and fit into the “low individualism” category. There difference is considerable, and Asian expatriates should become conscious of this difference prior to their move and be ready to face such difference.

5.3 Masculinity vs. Femininity

A masculine society is one where assertiveness, achievement, and success are important values. According to Hofstede in masculine societies the emotional gender-roles are strictly divided. Men are expected to be assertive, tough and aim at material success, while women are expected to be modest, tender and oriented towards quality of life. In feminine societies, the emotional gender roles often overlap. Men as well as women are expected to be modest, tender and oriented towards quality of life. (Nunez 2007, 51-52)

Feminine societies	Masculine societies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small gender culture gap • More equal job and education opportunity • Larger share of women in professional and technical jobs • Socialization toward nontraditional gender roles • Women describe themselves as more competitive than men do • Men allowed to be gentle, feminine, and weak • Men claim suppressing joy and sadness • Women's liberation means that men and women should take equal share both at home and at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger gender culture gap • Less equal job and education opportunity • Smaller share of women in professional and technical jobs • Socialization toward traditional gender roles" • Men describe themselves as more competitive than women do • Women should be gentle and feminine; nobody should be weak • Men claim showing joy and sadness • Women's liberation means that women should be admitted to position thus far occupied only by men

Figure 5 – Masculinity

(Power distance: dimension and methodology, 2001)

Table illustrates the difference between feminine societies and masculine societies.

The higher the score, the more masculine the country is. Finland scores 26 in Masculinity, which makes Finland rather Feminine society. Asia's average is 53 which make Asian countries clearly more masculine. The gap is rather large and therefore Asian expatriates should have a look into the differences between these two societies and be ready to face the differences.

5.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which members of a culture learned to feel comfortable in unstructured, unknown situations. Uncertainty avoidance is expressed in stress, and the need for predictability is expressed in the form of having strict formal and informal rules. This minimizes uncertain situations.

In high uncertainty avoidance countries, people grow up surrounded by strict rules about what is and what is not allowed. People learn at a very young age that uncertainty is a threat. Rules are not only the written rules. They also include unwritten, informal rules of behavior, such as wearing the correct clothes, and correct interaction. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, people grow up with flexible rules about what is allowed and what is not allowed. People learn at a young age that uncertainty is normal, and that living life as it comes is also possible. Motivating factors in low uncertainty avoidance countries are achievement, appreciation, room for personal growth and social needs. (Nunez 2007, 53-54)

High uncertainty avoidance	Low uncertainty avoidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populations higher anxiety level • More worry about the future • Higher job stress • Great generation gap • Less achievement motivation • Fear of failure • Less risk-taking • Lower ambition for individual advancement • More emotional resistance to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populations lower anxiety level • Great readiness to live by the day • Lower job stress • Smaller generation gap • Stronger achievement motivation • Hope of success • More risk-taking • Strong ambition for individual advancement • Less emotional resistance to change

Figure 6 – Uncertainty Avoidance

This table illustrated the difference between High Uncertainty avoidance societies and Low Uncertainty avoidance societies.

(Power distance: dimension and methodology, 2001)

Finland has Uncertainty avoidance score of 59 which means Finland places in the middle of the list. This means Finland can't be placed directly in neither of these cat-

egories, but has more or less traits from both sides. In Uncertainty avoidance Asia is very similar to Finland, since Asia's average in Uncertainty avoidance is 58. Therefore expatriates should have no problems adjusting to Finland when it comes to uncertainty avoidance.

Cultural dimension can vary quite a bit even between countries from the same region. The following table illustrates the differences between the five nationalities represented in this thesis. Figures for the table were taken from Geert Hofstede's "Cultural dimensions" study. Figures for Nepal were not available.

	<u>Power Distance</u>	<u>Individualism</u>	<u>Masculinity</u>	<u>Uncertainty Avoidance</u>
Bangladesh	80	20	55	60
Thailand	64	20	34	64
China	80	20	66	30
India	77	48	56	40
Nepal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Figure 7 - Four dimension figures for 5 countries represented in this study. (Hofstede, G. Cultural dimensions)

5.5 Cultural dimensions conclusion

The difference in cultural dimension scores between Finland and Asia is substantial. Uncertainty avoidance is the only trait in which Finland and Asia are close to each others. The three other cultural dimensions all have a considerable difference and this is something each expatriate should become aware of so they can prepare to face such differences in the Finnish society. These are issues that come up in everyday life and if the expatriate has no knowledge of these differences the adaptation process is going to be more difficult. As long as the expatriate is aware of these issues and is ready to be open-minded about the differences the adaptation to Finnish society should become easier.

6 CROSSING CULTURES SUCCESSFULLY

Moving into a new culture can be an exciting adventure, but it has also been compared to playing a game without knowing the rules. The moves the other players are making don't seem to make any sense. And worse still, everyone clearly expects one to make certain moves— but one might now have any idea what they are or when and how to make them. There is no substitute for learning about the culture of the new host country before arriving to ensure a smooth international relocation. Although it might seem easier to wait and learn about new country once there, preparing ahead of time— while still in the comfort of one's own culture— will give the tools to make local friends, work with host-country colleagues, avoid common pitfalls, and enjoy the new country from the start. The more knowledge and understanding one has about the new host culture, the more confident and competent one will feel in those challenging early weeks. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 63-64)

6.1 Cross-cultural communication

Cultures include assumptions, values, expectations, and attitudes that have developed among groups of people over time. No matter where in the world one is travelling, and no matter how open-minded a person is, there will inevitably be times when one's own values, expectations, and habits clash with those of the local people. Even if one already speak the same language as the new hosts or share cultural roots, one will still need to bridge the gap between one's own culture and theirs. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 64-65)

Unfortunately, one cannot assume that people in the host country will meet halfway and show understanding for cultural differences because one is a foreigner. They may never have traveled out of their country before and found themselves forced to adjust to another culture. They may not even realize that people in other countries have different ways of doing the things they accept as "normal." As a guest, one has the responsibility for reaching out and trying to accommodate to the culture around. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 63-64)

Four general stages are involved in bridging the gap between one's own culture and another. It doesn't matter in which order one works through these stages, and as knowledge increases, going back and forth among the different stages is common as well.

1. Realizing that people in other places have developed different ways of dealing with the greater and lesser questions of life.
2. Familiarizing with one's own culturally based values, expectations, and attitudes, rather than taking them for granted.
3. Studying the specific attitudes, expectations, and values of the target culture.
4. Learning how to interact with people in another culture based on an understanding of their point of view, even if it feels somehow strange, or inadaptable.

(Hess & Linderman 2007, 65)

6.2 Cross-cultural skills

Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. The following section presents some measures to help one move as effectively as possible through the four stages mentioned above.

One of the first requirements for cross-cultural communication is simply realizing that people in other places have very different ways of going about their daily lives, including different attitudes and values. What is considered "common sense" in one culture may make no sense at all to people who grew up somewhere else. Even if one has never lived overseas before, one has probably become aware of some of these differences in encounters with people from different countries, ethnic groups, or even regions within one's own country. One might have realized during a language class that an expression could not be translated adequately. Or upon admiring a decorative object in a foreign friend's home, it is offered as a gift even though that was not at all the point.

To boost skills in this area, one should think back experiences with people from other backgrounds. Or immerse oneself in another culture by spending time in an immi-

grant neighborhood, watching a foreign movie, or reading a novel written by someone from a different culture. Try to identify ways in which the values, attitudes, and expectations one encounters differ from one's own. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 66-68)

6.3 Cultural self-awareness

Before one can succeed in understanding another culture, one must become aware of one's own. As expatriates begin to realize how one's own values, attitudes, and expectations have been shaped by their home culture, they will be in a better position to see things from the point of view of people in other cultures. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 66)

There are many ways one can increase awareness. Thinking one's own values, habits, and attitudes helps to understand how other people might perceive this kind of behavior. Talking to people who have been immigrants in the host country, or only as visitors, should help one immensely to get a better idea of the host-country in general. Reading books and publications about one's own culture helps significantly to understand what people in other countries might find surprising and unusual about your country. People don't usually examine their own culture because they don't see the benefits of it, but the findings can be surprising and reading about it will definitely help when the move to another country comes current. Values, attitudes, and expectations vary among generations, but some issues stay the same and don't change. The ones that have stayed the same represent some of the deepest cultural assumptions. All expatriates will face people who don't share the same values, and one should be ready to face this kind of people without any prejudice. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 69-71)

6.4 Host country information

Information is the key to success in a specific culture. Learning about the new host culture before arriving will give a head start on one's own adjustment, and help to make a favorable impression on the local people. One should look for information that specifically addresses the new culture, such as websites, manuals, and publica-

tion. Being able to communicate in the target countries language helps greatly as well. Not only will it open doors once one arrives, but the language itself provides valuable insight into the culture. One should pay special attention to common sayings and expressions. Obviously one can't master the language prior to the move, but being able to communicate even some makes one's adjustment easier and also shows to local people the interest one has in their country and language. After arrival one should try to interact with ordinary people since they may be the best source of information. Such as the seller at the market, next-door neighbor, and local students at school all have something to teach you about the new culture. All one needs is a willingness to reach out and to observe. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 67)

Once one becomes aware of the depth of cultural differences as well as the specific differences between one's own culture and that of your host country, one can take the final step in cross-cultural communication: learning to interact with the local people based on an understanding of their point of view, whether or not one agrees with it or adopts it. This can be a very delicate task, requiring one to suppress many of their own reactions and to hold back criticism of things that appear nonsensical or "wrong." But like everyone, the local people have been raised to think that their way of doing things is the best way. They will rarely respond favorably when a foreigner insists that his or her way is even better. Showing respect for the local culture is not only the polite thing to do; it will help making friends and interacting successfully with local people easier. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 68)

When foreigners arrive into a new country local people are often very interested about outsiders' impressions of their country. Anyone you meet might ask you a seemingly random question about Finland, and one should be ready for this kind of situations, and think up an all-purpose, positive answer such as; "The people are very friendly", "the landscape is beautiful", "the food is delicious"— something that can be said with conviction. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 68)

It can come as a shock to realize that what one does overseas doesn't just reflect on the expatriate personally; it also reflects on one's home country and the fellow citizens. This awareness can add a bit to the strain of living abroad— one may feel as if they always have to be on their best behavior. However, one may find that the efforts

to make a good impression overseas can ultimately lead to personal growth. In spite of all this, one will sometimes feel the urge to vent complaints about the host country and culture. This is only natural. But one shouldn't do it with local citizens or even at a club where expatriates gather; save it for discreet and sympathetic friends. And one should make sure not to make griping an ongoing habit, or they will risk slowing down their own adjustment and turning overseas life into a bitter, unpleasant experience. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 69)

7 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Cultures are living, changing entities that emerge from a wide range of influences. History, climate, geography, religion, economic factors, and neighboring cultures all help determine the foods people eat, the way they dress, the homes they live in, and the patterns of their daily lives. Even more subtly, these factors combine with others to affect how people view issues such as time, work, the family, and interpersonal relationships. Cultures are not uniform throughout a country— instead, many variations and gradients can be seen among regions, ethnic groups, generations, and particular individuals. It is incorrect, and even offensive, to expect every individual to fit some sort of national stereotype. However, generalizations about the culture of a particular place can be useful as long as they are viewed merely as guidelines to help the foreign visitor understand and adapt. As one sets out to understand the host culture one will encounter external differences; expectations, expressed in the form of written and unwritten rules; and underlying attitudes or beliefs. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 69-70)

Although some external differences, such as local food, dress, and similar customs may pose a challenge at first, these cultural traits also provide some of the most colorful, exotic, and enjoyable experiences of overseas life. Even better, by living in the country one will gain opportunities to experience these phenomena more fully than any tourist (Hess & Linderman 2007, 70)

The written and unwritten rules of another culture are harder to identify than the more obvious ones stated above. And if rules are broken, one may face social embarrassment, legal trouble, or even physical danger. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 71)

Attitudes toward rules vary from country to country. In some places, one must follow the rules whether they make sense or not. In other societies rules may be flexible, depending on the situation. In still other countries, rules may be “on the books” but ignored in actual practice; for example in Finland using a bicycle helmet is obligatory. This law is broken regularly, and yet nobody seems to mind. Cultures also vary in their approach to authority. In many societies, authority isn’t earned primarily through competence but comes with age, social status, or seniority within a company. Great respect may be shown to people in positions of authority. In dealing with host-country colleagues, it is crucial to understand the local concept of authority and to work with it, not against it. Before arriving in the new country, or as soon as possible afterwards, one should get familiar with these issues to make sure to not get in awkward situations. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 79-80)

7.1 Visible cultural differences

There are quite a few issues in every foreign culture which can be noticed by simply being observant. By observing the world around with heightened sensitivity one can become more familiar with some of the more tangible issues of any given culture.

One should find out what is considered to be appropriate dress code for men and women, and what is not accepted. Some travelers find this issue offensive, believing that the way they dress is their own business. However, clothing sends signals to the people around— about wealth, level of formality, perhaps even the sexual availability— signals that vary greatly from culture to culture.

One should figure out what are the usual greetings between strangers, friends, men, and women. It is also important to know when first names are used, and when it might not be a proper etiquette. An overly informal greeting or form of address may be seen as rude, derailing a relationship before it even starts. Greetings may take the form of questions which one is not expected to answer. Handshakes, hugs, or kisses

on the cheek may also accompany greetings. Find out when these are expected and who should initiate them. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 70-72)

Knowing the basic gestures in the host country is important knowledge, and if there are gestures or body language which can be considered rude, or sexually suggestive. Everyday gestures can be a cultural minefield because they are used so often, yet they vary greatly from country to country. Find out also about possible cultural or religious taboos. For example, some religions do not allow nonbelievers to enter a place of worship. Devout Muslims do not eat, drink, or smoke during daylight hours during the month of Ramadan, and it is rude or even illegal in some places to break this fast in public. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 72)

It's a good idea to find information about what rules of etiquette should guest and hosts follow, and how gift giving and "thank you" are handled. Some countries have strict beliefs about number of blooms in a bouquet, so it's important to know these beliefs to not make a crucial mistake without even knowing it.

Find out about the usual etiquette about shopping as well. It is good to know whether haggling is proper or not. There are countries in which haggling is pretty much pointless, and can actually be seen rude but in others it is almost expected and is just a normal part before making the actual transaction. It is also good to know if one is expected to tip in a restaurant, and how tipping is handled if it is customary. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 72-74)

Researchers have documented the curious fact that people in every culture have a typical "personal space envelope"—people who are waiting in line or having a conversation feel comfortable at a highly specific distance from each other. If one moves to a culture with a larger personal space envelope, one may perceive the people as distant and cold. However, if the typical personal space envelope in the new host country is smaller than one's own, it may result in an uncomfortable feeling that people are crowding in, and it may result in backing up during conversations, as the other people keep inching closer and closer. Invasion of personal space often leads to

discomfort, anger, or anxiety on the part of the victim. Those living in densely populated places tend to have a smaller personal space. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 76)

Eye contact also varies from culture to culture. In Europe and North America, direct eye contact is valued as a sign of honesty and openness. In some Asian cultures, however, it is considered rude for subordinates to look directly into their employer's eyes. Similarly, cultures vary greatly in the amount of interpersonal touching they consider normal. In many places women greeting each other touch cheeks for an "air kiss"—one, two, or even three times, depending on the country. Hand-holding between friends is common in Asia, the Middle East, and many other places. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 76-77)

7.2 Attitudes and values

The attitudes of one's new hosts may present the greatest challenge of all. Firstly, they are not easy to uncover. Natives of the host country will readily speak about their customs and rules, but they may not be able to explain the attitudes and values that guide their behavior— mostly because these are taken for granted and accepted as common sense. Second, some values and attitudes of the host-country locals may clash strongly with one's own. Some things they do may appear senseless, wrong, or unfair, according to one's own value system. As one gets to know the country and its people better, they may find that actions that were offending at first really do make sense in the context of the local culture. However, one may confront some local attitudes and practices and find them truly misleading, no matter how well one understands the culture. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 74-76)

Different cultures have a very different attitude towards time and the importance to be on schedule. Especially western countries see time as linear, rigid, and scarce. "Time is money" they say, as they rush from one place to another, feeling stressed if they are behind schedule. Other cultures see time as more flexible and abundant— there is always enough to go around. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 75)

Nevertheless, a respectful, good-faith attempt to understand the following types of values and attitudes prevalent in the host culture will reward in several ways. One

will better understand why the people around do the things they do, learn how to accept them and interact with them on their own terms, thus avoiding offense. And last but not least, one's own way of thinking will be broadened by exposure to different points of view, whether or not one ultimately find them convincing. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 75)

The religion or religions of the host country will inevitably affect the local people's outlook on life. Learning about local religious practices can give a deep insight into the cultural and social life of the people, as well as being a fascinating experience. Asian people follow a wide variety of different religions, Christianity being a very small part of it. Finland is a Christian country, and most Asian's are probably not too familiar with the concepts and nuances of Christianity. It is worth learning at least a little about the local religion, so that one won't break a taboo without realizing it. (Hess & Linderman 2007, 83)

8 CULTURAL ADAPTABILITY

To build and maintain relationships that allow expatriates to interact effectively with people in target country, they have to figure out what the differences and similarities are between them and others with whom they interact with. Those differences affect expectations, approaches to work, views of authority, and other issues. They make working more complex, and call for a new kind of flexibility for handling differences and change – cultural adaptability. Cultural adaptability is the willingness and ability to recognize, understand, and work effectively across cultures. It presumes that such interactions will have successful outcomes. Tasks are completed, goals are met, and the people involved are satisfied with their professional relationships. Cultural adaptability is extremely essential for all expatriates. (Deal 2007, 7)

Employees at all levels of contemporary organizations bring different values, expectations, and perspectives – their culture – with them to work. Those differences affect how individuals in these organizations lead, manage, and interact with others, and how the work gets done. There are many definitions of culture, but one common idea

explicit in all of the definitions is that culture is shared. Culture includes, among other things, beliefs about what is acceptable or unacceptable conduct within a society or group of people. It includes deeply held values and beliefs that influence behavior which can be interpreted in many different ways by people outside of that. (Deal 2007, 7-8)

Culture also includes expectations about how people will behave in particular situations or relationships. Most people understand that they work with, serve, and are surrounded by people with different mind-sets and expectations based on different backgrounds. Most people may also understand that responding to those people with “that isn’t the way we do things here” just isn’t going to work in a world that grows ever more connected. An expatriate can’t expect to know exactly how to behave in every different place or with every different person. But it is important to appreciate the importance of a skill such as cultural adaptability, because the people with whom one interacts with think and act differently. (Deal 2007, 9)

One’s cultural adaptability will increase as they gain knowledge and skills that one can use to interact effectively with people from different cultural background. What does it take to develop cultural adaptability? Four components are necessary.

- Examine cultural foundations.
- Expect to encounter cultural differences.
- Educate yourself about different cultures.
- Experience cross-cultural interactions and learn from them.

(Deal 2007, 12)

Examining cultural foundations

Developing cultural adaptability doesn’t mean changing as a person or giving up cultural identity. Even if one works in another country or culture one might learn to adapt, but basic cultural orientation is unlikely to change. One component of developing cultural adaptability is to understand one’s own cultural background and how it affects. Each of us operates in a “cultural comfort zone” and sees the world through the lens of a particular cultural conditioning. Culture influences our percep-

tions in a given situation, our interpretations of others' behaviors, and our actions and reactions. Awareness of these influences is necessary for developing cross-cultural flexibility. (Deal 2007, 12)

Being more fully aware of cultural foundations helps to avoid unconsciously judging others or expecting others to think, feel, and behave as we do. Prejudging is a natural reaction when these interactions push us out of our comfort zone. Most people prefer what is predictable, familiar, and comfortable. When faced with difference, we may feel stimulated and move to embrace it. But as we move farther and farther away from our comfort zone, especially if we are dealing with differences that threaten our ways of explaining the world, there is a tendency for us to retreat to where we feel more comfortable, and in other words we jump back to the comfort zone. Jumping back isn't wrong. It's actually necessary for us to retreat from a new experience so we can reflect on it, understand it, and integrate it into our understanding of the world. One way to increase the cultural adaptability is to stretch beyond one's comfort zone and stay longer in areas that are unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable to increase one's exposure to different people and their way of doing things. To make the best use of the natural jump-back response, one should try to stay longer in the "uncomfortable" place while making sure one has the chance to retreat to where one feels comfortable. That respite gives the time and space to integrate new experiences into one's stock of cultural intelligence and to gain the confidence to venture out again. (Deal 2007, 12-14)

Encountering cultural differences

Expatriates should be alert to the impact of cultural differences when dealing with people from foreign cultures. One should look for clues what these differences might be in certain interaction. Clues include such things as confusion, frustration, anxiety, irritation, and miscommunication. These are often present when cultural differences are at play. Although it's possible to overemphasize cultural differences, the greater danger for expatriates is their minimizing the differences, only to be caught off guard when conflict, performance problems, or other challenges arise. This is particularly true in relationships where the differences may be subtle or beneath the surface. (Deal 2007, 12-13)

Living and studying overseas can be extremely rewarding in personal and career terms. It is also likely to herald a dramatic change of lifestyle. All expatriates, no matter to which country they are posted, have to make some adjustment to life overseas, and all members of an expatriate's family will be affected by the move, whether or not they venture abroad. (Reuvid 2007, 169)

Anyone contemplating a move overseas has probably tried to imagine what it will be like. Most people think about the physical differences: the heat, the coldness, the humidity, the dirt, etc, although they are rarely able to assess how these differences will affect their daily lives. While it is easy to imagine that things will be different, it is hard to imagine how this affects the quality of daily life and one's sense of well-being. But the differences that prove the greatest barrier to adjustment are the ones that cannot be seen and that are not normally even thought about. (Reuvid 2007, 170)

Despite some differences in Europe most people have grown up with common experiences and expectations of how the world works. In any given situation, most people have a fairly clear idea of what is expected of them and what they expect of others. However, different nationalities all over the world do not necessarily share the same assumptions and expectations about life, or about how other people should behave. Most western countries, Finland as well, are nominally Christian countries, yet although much legislation and ordinary behavior have their origins in Christian teaching, a relatively small proportion of the population would see Christianity as the driving force of these societies. It can be difficult to understand how other people operate; it is easy to assume that the motivations of others are understood, while misunderstanding them utterly. (Reuvid 2007, 170)

8.1 Culture Shock

The expatriate experiences considerable anxiety when faced unknowingly with the loss of minor cues: the familiar signs and symbols of one's host country that are taken for granted are open to different interpretations in the host country. This constant disorientation is unnerving and can cause considerable stress. The syndrome is so common that it has been given a name – culture shock. Doctors have long recognized

that changes in normal lifestyle can result in stress, and ultimately physical and mental illness. Change of home, change of friends, change of job, change of lifestyle, loss of or separation from ones partner may all be experienced by the expatriate, who may be deprived of his or her traditional means of support and solace. Moving abroad and going to new schools is stressful in itself, but when the school is in a new, and seemingly hostile, environment the tensions are even greater. Symptoms associated with culture shock include heightened anxiety and worry, feelings of isolation and helplessness, and a poor performance. (Reuvid 2007, 171)

Five stages of culture shock

Stage one, the honeymoon stage, is where the expatriate feels excitement and fascination with the new culture. Like with any new experience one might get the feeling of euphoria. Excitement, stimulation, and curiosity are feelings new expatriates often feel. During this stage one still feels close to everything familiar back home. Second stage, the distress stage, is when expatriate overlooks minor problems and look forward to learning new things. Stage two can be seen as crisis period, this is when excitement turns into disappointment and it seems as if there are more and more problems and unpleasant occurrences. One can feel confused, isolated, and inadequate. Realization that one's familiar support system, family and friends, are not easily accessible. Third stage, the adjustment stage, is where expatriate starts to accept the differences and feel like it's possible to live with them. One feels more confident and is better able to cope with problems that may arise based on the experiences gathered. A feeling of isolation is gone and appreciation towards the new culture and all the new experiences arises. (Pedersen 1995, 3-4)

Fourth stage, the acceptance/adaptation phase, is where one will feel at home and become involved in activities, and start enjoying target countries customs. Living in the target country starts to become enjoyable, and one feels comfortable and confident and is able to make decision based on one's own preferences and values. The important part of finding appreciation in the differences and similarities of both cultures is finally reached. The fifth stage, the re-entry shock, may take place when the expatriate returns home. The effect are similar that of in regular culture shock. Expatriates who return home often re-examine their priorities, their values, and what they

think of themselves and their home country. One might have an idealized view of home and when the expectation of total familiarity turns out to be false it can cause some distress. The expectation of being able to pick up exactly where one left off cause's problems when reality doesn't meet the expectations. Home may fall short of what one may have envisioned. (Pedersen 1995, 3-4)

8.2 Three types of expatriates

Jonathan Reuvid identifies three different forms of culture shock which expatriates can experience and these are: Chauvinistic expatriate, Go Bush expatriate and Open-minded expatriate.

Chauvinistic expatriates response to his or her predicament is to try to create a mini encapsulate of their own country. This expatriate's attempts to understand the local way of doing things, or local colleagues, are minimal. Faced with the difficulties of this new environment him or her retreats from what is perceived as a hostile host country and people. The blame for misunderstandings is never anything to do with him or her, but is always the fault of the 'stupid' locals. This expatriate falls into a trap of denigrating everything local and idealizing everything from back home, ultimately provoking real hostility from local counterparts and making a reality of his or her view of humor herself alone against the world. Local expatriate clubs are full of this kind of expatriate, who often indulges his or her aggression over more drinks than are healthy. The chauvinistic expatriate is experiencing culture shock. He or she is disorientated by the environment and feels constantly at sea. The symptoms of this state are endless complaining, glorification of home country, alcoholic over-indulgence and general aggression. At this stage the expatriate will find it hard to interact with local people and will be permanently miserable. It is at this stage also that expatriates tend to terminate their stay, prior to completion. Fortunately for most expatriates, this is a passing stage and after their first home leave, when the realities of life in host country are forced upon them, they manage to adapt successfully. (Reuvid 2007, 171-172)

The second form of culture shock is the 'Go bush' expatriate which is the rarest form of culture shock, in which expatriate avoids the company of his fellow expatriates,

and tends to override all things local. He identifies totally with the host culture, which many of his local colleagues find both patronizing and suspicious. 'Go bush' expatriates might even unconsciously resent expatriates who spend time with other expatriates. (Reuvid 2007, 172)

The third and probably most appropriate response, but the most difficult to achieve, is that of the 'open-minded expatriate' who, without abandoning his or her own values, is able to accept the new culture and attempt to understand it. This involves understanding how the host society's values are reflected in everyday behavior. Decisions are made without the necessity for qualitative judgment. While differences are acknowledged, they are not categorized as better or worse. If, prior to arriving abroad, one can come to terms with the idea that there are real cultural differences which need to be understood, one will find it much easier to adjust. Social life can sometimes be restricted, as some expatriates make little attempt to get to know local people and mix almost entirely in expatriate circles. One should try to avoid this misstep and be open and attentive towards locals. (Reuvid 2007, 172-173)

9 RESEARCH

This thesis deals with Asian expatriate students in Finland. The main topic is The Adjustment process of Asian expatriate students. The questionnaire was sent to interviewees before conducting the personal interview to let them know the topics and issues we would deal in the interview. Nine personal interviews were conducted with expatriates from various Asian countries. Four of them were women, and five of them were men. The average age of interviewees was 24.5 years, youngest being 20 years old and oldest 31 years old. Three of them were first year students, three, second year students, and two third year students. One of the interviewees had just begun her fifth year. All of the interviewees studied in Degree Programme in International Business and Marketing Logistics.

9.1 Background of the research

Research method in this thesis was personal interview with support from pre-scripted questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to potential interviewees through e-mail, and it included 19 questions altogether. There were a few different topics which were discussed in detail in personal interviews:

- Background information
- Pre-departure/arrival
- Culture related questions
- Cultural dimensions
- On-site learning/Adaptation

Even though most of the interviewees didn't demand on it, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by conducting the research according to research ethics.

9.2 Personal interview

Personal interview was conducted with all of the 9 respondents. This means that there were pre-planned questions to ask during the interview, but the questions were let to flow naturally, based on the information provided by the respondent. The flow of the conversation dictated the questions asked, as well as the order of the questions.

The benefit of having personal interview is that one can get more in-depth answers from the interviewees. Some of the topics were also somewhat sensitive, and the personal interview is likely the best way to get the most accurate answer. Also with face-to-face interviews the interviewer can notice and react to non-verbal clues. If interviewer notices some non-verbal communication which one believes to be relevant to the topic, a follow-up question can be made to go deeper into the topic at hand.

9.3 Types of data

There are two types of data: Qualitative and Quantitative.

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research. In general terms, scientific research consists of an investigation that:

- Seeks answers to a question
- Systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question.
- Collects evidence
- Produces findings that were not determined in advance
- Produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study

Qualitative research shares these characteristics. Additionally, it seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social context of particular populations.

By definition Quantitative research is ‘explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics) (Aliaga and Gunderson 2000)

Quantitative research is used to measure how many people feel, think or act in a particular way. These surveys tend to include large samples - anything from 50 to any number of interviews. Structured questionnaires are usually used incorporating mainly closed questions - questions with set responses.

(<http://www.marketresearchworld.net>)

9.4 Qualitative research methods

The three most common qualitative methods are participant observation, in depth-interviews, and focus groups. Each method is particularly suited for obtaining a specific type of data.

- Participant observation is appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviors in their usual contexts.
- In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored.
- Focus groups are effective in eliciting data on the cultural norms of a group and in generating broad overviews of issues of concern to the cultural groups or subgroups represented.

9.5 Methodology chosen for this thesis

The main objective of this study was to find out the main challenges Asian expatriate students face when moving to Finland, and to find out how future expatriates could prepare upon arrival. Qualitative method was chosen for this research simply because it is especially effective in obtaining specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social context of particular population. In-depth personal interview was chosen for this research to get as accurate information from each interviewee as possible. Some sensitive topics were explored as well, and this method is known to be the best way to get deeper understanding of these issues.

9.6 Validity and reliability of the research

There are a few issues which need to be pointed out about the validity and reliability of the research. The sample size is very small, and even in the small sample size there are five different nationalities represented which are India, Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal, and China. This diversity of nationalities in a small sample size can skew the results if precise distinctions would be made between different nationalities.

Therefore examination between different nationalities will not be made. The maximum number of answers given by any nationality is three, which is not optimal as Chinese students represent 33% of the answers. This is not too dominant to skew the result majorly, and it is still believed the answers represent Asia as a whole.

Another issue which has to be taken into account is that a few of the interviewees had been in Europe before moving to Finland, making them somewhat accustomed to western culture. This issue eases the move for those people and therefore the results may not be same as what it would have been with people whom have no personal first-hand experience about western culture.

There have been Asian expatriates before who have dropped out and went back to their home countries. This research consists of only active students and people who have dropped out are not represented in this research. This might alter the results into more positive one compared to what it might have been if those whom have dropped out would have been represented as well. Percentage of those who have dropped out is fairly small though, and therefore too much weight should not be put into this matter.

The literature review of this study was composed from books written by highly respected professionals. A few books used were rather old, but the issues talked about in these books were rarely subject to change. These books were also referred in fairly new publications which gives credibility to their use

10 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

In the following part the answers given by interviewees will be put under deliberate examination. In every part there will be summary of the answers given, and in some parts straight quotes from interviewees will be given if that is the best way to illustrate the issue. If there is a clear difference in answers given by nationality, gender, or age that will be pointed out. Otherwise clear distinctions will not be made. The

sample size is small and therefore the variance in answers given by any nationality, gender, or age is substantial as well.

Expatriate students

Nine students were interviewed for this thesis, five of them being men and four of them being women. Five different nationalities were interviewed which are as follows: three people from China, two people from Thailand, two people from Bangladesh, one from India and one from Nepal. Four of the interviewees are first year students, two are second year students, two of them are on their third year, and one of them had just started her fifth year. The age of interviewees ranged from 20 years old up to 31.

Pre-departure learning and home country mentoring

The first issue discussed handled with preparation prior to the actual move in Finland. All of the nine interviewees did some reading on their own prior to the move. Internet was the main source of information. A few of them also read some books, but in the end found internet to be the best source of information. Quite a few websites were mentioned, the most common ones being Wikipedia, Google Earth, and Finland.fi. According to the interviewees finding useful information about Finland was rather easy, and they all believe it was helpful. They all believe that getting some information of the target country is important when moving abroad. Pre-departure learning is something Hess and Linderman consider being extremely important as well, and luckily they all seem to have realized this.

Out of nine people interviewed, six got help from someone, and three of them did everything by themselves. One of them had an uncle living in Helsinki and got tremendous help from him. He believes he would have never applied to Finland if it wasn't for his uncle. Two of them had an agent in their home-country looking for schools abroad, and both of them applied for several schools in Europe with the help of the agent. One of them had been in Rauma before as an exchange student, and had a friend in Rauma from whom she got tremendous help from prior to move and after

arrival as well. One of them got help from her local school in home country. One of them had a local friend who had been in Finland before and knew how the application process works. The three of them who did it by themselves found the application process to be a bit challenging and not very easy at all.

Some extra stress was caused by English exam they had to pass before the move. Some of them felt their English skills may not be up to the standards needed for the studies, and were second guessing their decision to move abroad to study.

Host country mentoring

After arrival they all had quite a few people to turn to if they needed help. From the university the international assistant was mentioned several times. They also got help from Finnish tutors, as well as other Asian expatriate students. With study related issues they all felt they had the support from school and found it comforting in this new unique situation they were in. The importance of having a local person to assist after arrival has been discussed in various publications. Finnish student tutors are vital for this exact reason, and it doesn't matter how important they are perceived to be. The fact they are there if needed must bring comfort to expatriates.

For general issues they got mostly help from other Asian expatriates. They felt that help from people who have been in the same situation can give more useful information about general issues than Finnish people can, or at least this was the perception most of them had. They also found out that not having a Finnish speaking person with them while running on different errands was not vital at all. According to their experience, Finnish customer servants are very helpful and easy to communicate with in English. They all got issues like banking, cell phone subscription, internet connection etc. handled without too much hassle. Hess and Linderman speak highly about the importance of finding help from either local people or home country colleagues. Both ways are certainly vital for smooth relocation.

Even though they didn't have any major problems with general issues most of them felt like they needed to find help themselves, and felt like more could have been done

by Finnish tutors to help them. Finnish tutors did a lot to get them comfortable by arranging different get-togethers and parties, but not all of them are into partying and therefore felt like Finnish tutors help was rather insufficient.

Cultural challenges and differences

Many issues were discussed regarding cultural challenges and differences, but most of the issues dealt with the Finnish character. A few examples of the answers: “Finnish people are very shy and hard to approach”, “Shy and introvert”, “It’s hard to get to know people”, “Finnish people are very reserved”. These answers illustrate very well how Finnish people are perceived by Asian expatriate students. A few of interviewees pointed out that they are a bit shy themselves, and building a relationship with hard-to-approach Finnish people was rather challenging in the beginning. This seems to be in line with HSBC Expat Explorer Survey, as it indicates making friends is one of the main problems expatriates struggle with. They did know this trait about Finnish people in advance which was definitely important information since they knew the difficulty to connect was not their fault, but rather the clash of two different cultures. These problems could have been expected, as these are issues Hess & Linderman talk about.

Other cultural challenges which were mentioned were language and food. A few of the students felt like their English was not good enough to follow and take part in general conversations with Finnish people. This turned out to be true for a few of them since they felt they had to repeat what they said rather often. This problem went away quickly though after learning the language better and focusing on their enunciation. Finnish food was also mentioned as a cultural difference, but this was not seen as problem since most of them liked Finnish food and were also able to find oriental food from different shops around Rauma if they so fancied.

When discussion turned into Finnish customs and Finnish way of doing things the interviewees had a few issues they wanted to point out. The most popular topic was usage of alcohol which, according to every single interviewee, is massive in Finland. A few of them are still not used to it and rather stay away from places they know

people drink heavily. Most of them are used to it though, and they understand it is a way for Finnish people to relax and have fun. It was also pointed out that Finnish people open up a lot more and are easier to approach when they are intoxicated. Another issue which was pointed out by a few interviewees was Finnish sauna. The ones who mentioned this issue found it strange that people are reserved in normal social situations, but they have no problem being naked in front of others. For Asian expatriates it seems to be the other way around.

Very clear cultural difference which was discussed as well was the way people speak to each others. Finnish people are very direct when talking about any given issue and a few interviewees felt like it can be seen as hostile and confrontational way to represent things. In the beginning it felt uncomfortable to listen, let alone be in the middle of this type of discussion. After it was understood this is not meant to be offensive in any way it was not a problem anymore. Hess and Linderman speak about the responsibility of the guest, as people in local country are not expected to meet the expatriate halfway. Everyone might not be aware of the cultural differences between the two of you, and therefore they can act offensive even when that is not intended.

A few issues were discussed about differences in educational culture. Everyone mentioned the more relaxed atmosphere in Finland compared to their respective countries. The main difference, which was mentioned by almost everyone, is the way teachers are addressed. In their respective countries the way to address teachers is very formal, which is not the case in Finland at all. Interaction between teachers and students is very different during lectures in Finland compared to Asian countries, since according to interviewees there is almost no interaction during lectures in Asian universities. Students don't take part during lectures unless they are spoken to. All of the aforementioned issues are very much in line with Hofstede's power distance dimension. The number of students in lectures is also significantly higher in Asia compared to Finland.

On-site learning and adaptation

On-site learning begins immediately after arrival. Everyone felt a bit lost but excited during first days or weeks in Finland. Student who didn't have any connection to Finland beforehand struggle the most. Two interviewees knew people from Rauma beforehand, and they felt this helped them tremendously. They believe having people they can contact with whatever issues and trust them with their problems is vital to get accustomed to life in Finland with ease.

People who did not have connections to Finland before arrival felt the most help they got from was either their room-mates, or other Asian expatriate students who have been in Finland for some time already. Finnish tutors and fellow students were mentioned as well, but most of the interviewees felt like there was more they could have done. When discussion turned into their social network of friends it became clear that Finnish disposition hinders the ease to make friends in local population. A few quotes from interviewees illustrate this issue well; "Finnish people are friendly and pleasant, but they rarely take the initiative to get to know you. If you see familiar faces in university they say hello, but rarely begin discussions with you", "Making friends with Finnish people is harder than with expatriates because they don't seem to have interest in you." These two quotes demonstrate the Finnish character quite well. Although most of them agreed that getting close to Finnish people was more challenging than expatriates they all had made local friends as well.

Several interviewees brought up the problem-based learning which was new to them. PBL includes a lot of working in pairs or small groups, and when asked about group work versus working alone and which they prefer the answers were as follows; six of them would rather work alone and three of them prefer working in groups. The answers were never this simplified though, since everyone added that they are OK with both ways. The biggest problem they saw in group work is that the work is often not divided equally, and some people can get away without doing much at all. It was said by many interviewees that group work is a great way to work if everyone does what they are supposed to do and others can trust this person does exactly that. They all have had good and bad experiences with group work and therefore are a bit unsure

about it in general. The reason most of them prefer working alone was that there is only one person responsible for the end result, and whether that result is good or bad it is what they deserve. In groups someone can work hard and get a bad grade, or vice versa. There was one very positive side about problem-based learning which everyone agreed on, and it was the fact that they all needed to interact with each other's which helped them to get to know one another better. One of them specifically mentioned being shy and feeling really stressed in the beginning whenever she had to speak in front of others. But after a while she gained confidence, and now she feels this way of learning can be very useful for shy people like her to boost their confidence.

When asked about taking part in social activities with Finnish people there were three who almost never take part in get-togethers. When asked reasons for not taking part, they all answered the usage of alcohol. It became clear to them after a while that most get-togethers with Finnish people means there will be alcohol involved, and since they don't use themselves they feel awkward in these situations and choose not to go at all. Six of them told they go often or at least sometimes. Reasons for not going were often school work or lack of money. The ones who do like to take part in get-together didn't mind the usage of alcohol.

When talking about issues that surprised them the most there were a few issues mentioned. Everyone knew Finland can be cold and dark during winter, but even with that information the coldness surprised them. Most of them had never experienced cold weather for extended periods of time, and this combined to darkness made them unhappy. Winter was the time of the year when feelings of depression and homesickness surfaced the most. Another thing which a few of them found surprising was the difficulty to find a part time job. The ones who mentioned this were struggling with money and wanted to emphasize the difficulty to find a job, and to be prepared for this. It is not given that one finds a job during first months in Finland.

Culture Shock

Culture shock is something everyone experiences in some way. When discussion turned into some of the known symptoms of culture shock all of them had at least a few of them. It is important to bear in mind that even if one does have some of the known symptoms it doesn't necessarily mean those feelings are consequence of culture shock. People can feel irritation or boredom in general as well. There were six most common symptoms listed and when asked which of those they are mostly affected by, homesickness was the most common with three answers. Loneliness or boredom and depression got both two answers. Social withdrawal and Irritation both got one answer. Excessive sleeping got zero answers. It is important to point out that all three who answered homesickness were first year students. Almost everyone mentioned they have felt homesick at some point, but only first year students chose it to be the one affecting them the most. Those two interviewees who answered they are mostly affected by loneliness or boredom are also those who almost never take part in common get-togethers, and this is likely the reason behind those feelings. Loneliness and boredom answers were backed up with slight criticism towards Rauma and its lack of thing to do during weekends and holidays. Whilst that may be true, it can also be another symptom of culture shock. As stated by Pedersen's publication, in stage two of culture shock excitement can turn into disappointments and criticism. To the rest of the answers it is hard to find any distinctive connection or reasons to why those other feelings might have surfaced. The sample size is very small to draw conclusions, and doing so would be a bit of a stretch.

Even though everyone has these feeling it is important to point out that none of them felt miserable or unhappy. These are normal symptoms of culture shock which is fairly unavoidable. But acknowledging these feelings is important in order to move towards adaptation. Luckily everyone had done some research in advance to hinder the affect of culture shock. They were well prepared and ready for the massive change in cultural surrounding.

11 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I gathered data through nine personal interviews to draw a picture of the life of Asian expatriate students in the Satakunta University of Applied Sciences; faculty of business and culture, Rauma. All nine interviewees were very cooperative and for that I am grateful. The result findings gives a good idea about the life current Asian expatriates are living in Rauma, and because of thorough discussion with interviewees I have a good reason to believe this situation is accurate enough to give some recommendations to future expatriates as well. The results should be taken with a grain of salt though, because of the small sample size. I didn't get experiences of those who have quit entirely or put their studies to halt indefinitely.

11.1 Conclusions

This study consisted of nine personal interviews with Asian expatriate students, and the outcome of these interviews gives a fairly good picture of how they are doing in general. The results indicate that the first few months are hardest for Asian expatriates, which is not surprising at all. Homesickness is something all of them were affected by at some point. Everyone besides first year students were able to overcome those feelings, and homesickness was present only "sometimes", as stated by most of them. For the three first year students homesickness was present quite a bit, but they didn't feel like it was affecting their daily life too much. Most of them mentioned holidays being the time when they mostly miss their families back home. After the interview it was quite clear all of them had struggled with emotions caused by culture shock at least to some extent. Those who had been in Finland or Europe before seemed to be able to integrate faster and less painfully to Finnish culture compared to those who had no firsthand experience with western cultures.

The research indicates that other Asian expatriates are the greatest source of information for newcomers. The help and support of Finnish student tutors were also mentioned, and it was said to be helpful as well. Many Asian expatriates become friends together, and they give a lot of credit to each others. As one interviewee stated, having Asian friends eases the feeling of homesickness because there are people who

“get you”. Many interviewees were friends together and the ones who have been in Finland longer had helped those who are just beginning their studies. Asians being friends together didn’t stop them from finding friends from the local population though, since all of them had Finnish friends as well.

I believe the results are somewhat reliable, or at least an indication to how Asian expatriates are doing in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. In many issues the answers were consistent enough to draw conclusions about the overall situation with Asian expatriates. All of the research problems were handled at least briefly, some more than others though. After conducting the interviews and analyzing the answers a few recommendations can be made.

11.2 Recommendations to future expatriates

After conducting nine personal interviews with Asian expatriate students and analyzing the answers there are some recommendations that can be made for future expatriates. These recommendations should not be taken as rules or absolute facts, but rather as guidelines and issues to think about when preparing the move to Finland.

The preparation is the single most important issue one should do properly upon arrival. This is the issue all interviewees brought up, and the importance of it cannot be emphasized enough. Preparation doesn’t only mean reading books about target country; it also means getting mentally ready to face awkward situations. It’s easy to get information about tangible differences, but there are plenty of underlying, deep cultural assumptions which can be hard to understand. Understanding intangible cultural assumptions might be very hard to grasp by reading books, but it’s important to be aware of these issues. This is not to say one shouldn’t look into these issues, on the contrary really. Knowing as much as possible about target country and its culture can ease the move remarkably. Having an open-mind, a decent amount of knowledge, and the desire to learn more about the target country should be enough to begin the unique experience of becoming an expatriate.

When entering into the new country first thing to do is to find some new friends to avoid getting feelings of loneliness. Finding a contact person from the target country

before the actual move would be optimal, but this might not be an easy task to do. Most likely there will be student tutors who are there to help the newcomers to get accustomed to Finland, but according to the answers given by Asian expatriates student, tutors are not the best way to get accustomed to Finnish ways. Most of them mentioned other Asian expatriate students, and their roommates to be the best source of information. It is recommended that Asian expatriates would find a place to live with roommates. This type of living has a few benefits compared to living alone. This is the cheapest way to live, and this way one has people to turn to in case they face any problems. One is also likely to make friends this way, and not become alienated from other students. Even though interviewees found their roommates and other Asians to be their best source of information in the beginning, one should not forget the student tutors either. They were found to be important and very helpful, and they also arrange get-together in the beginning to help people get acquainted with one another.

A few issues about living in general should be pointed out. Finland is rather expensive country to live in compared to most Asian countries. And as the research indicates, finding a job right away is not easy to do for non-Finnish speakers. One needs to acknowledge this issue before arrival. Another issue which was emphasized by a few interviewees was the harshness of winter. When people do research on Finland the weather and annual rhythm of seasons will most likely come to their knowledge, but winter still managed to surprise a few interviewees hard enough to mention it.

Expatriates should be aware of culture shock and its influence. The effect of culture shock can be diminished by good preparation and having an open-mind towards new culture. Assuming there will be some strange habits, values, or attitudes can help one to adjust better into the new culture. Even with good preparation one might not be able to avoid culture shock completely. Culture shock can be experienced in many ways, but the most common symptoms are: loneliness or boredom, homesickness, irritation, social withdrawal, depression, excessive sleeping, lack of appetite, and anger. Knowing the symptoms and being alert helps to identify these feelings when they surface.

There is no one simple solution to get rid of culture shock, but there are things one can do to relieve the uncomfortable feelings culture shock may inflict. The easiest way is exercise, as it is said to be one of the most effective solutions to mild depression and stress. Finding some time for oneself is a great idea as well, and maybe cooking some familiar food from back home, or reading a book to get one's mind off of things for a while. Talking to friends or family members back home will most likely help as well. These things will get one's mind back to familiar issues and cultural comfort zone. It's necessary to retreat from a new experience to reflect on it, to understand it, and to integrate it into their understanding of this new culture they are in.

11.3 Recommendations to the university

In general Asian expatriate students seem to be doing fine, and none of them had any big problems about Finland or the university itself. A few of them were homesick, which is very understandable for first year students. But even those who felt homesick seemed to be in very good form, and happy in general.

All of the interviewees were happy how things were handled with them, but a few issues were discussed where there might be some room for improvement. There are a bunch of tutors who supposed to take care of the first year students, and most of the time they do this just fine, especially for Finnish students. But it is very different being a foreigner in a new country than being a Finnish student. Finnish students share the language, they know how to behave in any given situation, they know how to address their teachers, and are comfortable overall in the familiar surroundings. Asian expatriate students have none of this. Everything is new to them. Tutors want to help them and are willing to answer their questions with the best of their ability, but often that might not be enough. The university could think about giving some information to tutors about cultural differences, and to make sure they understand the major change these new expatriates are experiencing in their lives. In addition to having Finnish tutors it would be great if Asian expatriates had a tutor of their own who is familiar with the situation they are in. Second or third year Asian Expatriate would be an ideal tutor for them to guide them through the first months of their studies. Having an Asian expatriate give the new comers a small lecture about his/her expe-

riences in the beginning would be a great way to give them first hand information what to expect, and what kind of issues they are likely to face during the first months.

Finnish students use their free time very differently compared to Asian students. Tutors arrange a lot of get-togethers for first year students in the beginning. These happenings are great ways to get to know one another, but as all the interviewees stated, a lot of alcohol is often consumed in student parties. For some Asians it is not a problem, but there are those who don't use alcohol themselves and it's understandable they feel like an outsiders in these events. A few interviewees mentioned that they don't take part in common events because of this, and it's not a good place to be in. They have two bad choices: either take part in the event and feel uncomfortable, or stay home and get alienated altogether. For someone who has this problem it's understandable they don't feel welcome, and most likely end up spending most of their time with other Asian expatriates with same kind of ideology. It would be great if tutors could arrange some events where no alcohol is consumed at all, but first year students could still have some fun together. From personal experience I know how common it is for Finnish students to use alcohol in almost any event imaginable, and therefore there is a risk the turnover for these happenings would be low. It is a challenge for tutors to make everyone feel welcome.

Another thing in which the university could help more is to find a place to live for newcomers. This is already done to some extent, but I believe it could be done better. Almost all new Asian expatriates live with one or two room-mates, and this is likely the best way for them to live for a few reasons, but the room-mates are pretty much assigned randomly. It would be better if the university could help them to get the same year students to be room-mates. This way they have each others to rely on, and they can figure things out together. It's better to be in an unfamiliar situation together with someone than alone.

It would be a good idea from the university to construct a rich info package about the university itself, general cultural differences, general issues which are good to know before arrival, and gather a few websites in there as well which are known to have good and reliable information about Finland. Having this kind of "survival guide"

could help them tremendously. Asian expatriates who are about to move to Finland probably have a lot in their minds, and proper preparation can easily be neglected. Having a guide in which they can trust would help a lot to make sure they have done at least something to get to know Finland prior to the move.

12 FINAL WORDS

After a long and fairly extensive writing process I am quite confident all research problems were handled, some better than others. Solving the problems Asian expatriates encounter is almost impossible, as most of them are culture related. But the study did produce a few recommendations to future expatriates as how to prepare better, and how to make the move as painless as possible. The main problem with this study was the small amount of interviews conducted. With more people the results would be more reliable, as now every interviewee has quite a significant part in the end result. This being said though, for some issues I believe the answers to be quite reliable. Many people struggled with same problems, and therefore it is probable that those are issues most Asian expatriates struggle with.

I don't know how much general significance this research has, but I hope and believe this study provides some new information about how Asian expatriate students are doing in general, and about some of the most common problems faced. I truly hope the results can be utilized by future expatriates and the university as well. A few recommendations were given to both of them, and I hope someone finds the information provided useful.

For further studies I would definitely recommend finding more interviewees. It would also be great to find people who have dropped out to find out reasons behind quitting. Interviewing people who have had bad experiences would be a great contrast for this study, in which every interviewee was generally happy with their life in Rauma. This study had too small a sample size to draw conclusions between different nationalities and gender, but it would be interesting to find out if those issues have much of an influence.

If someone is to conduct a similar study I believe the results are going to be somewhat similar. There seems to be some issues which are very common with Asian expatriates, and these results I believe to be valid. I found this study very interesting, and when I did work on it I was quite enthusiastic about the topic. But since this thesis took over a year to write, it's needless to say there were a few breaks in the writing process. For this I am not happy. But with the end result I am fairly happy with, and believe it to be at least mediocre. More could have been done, especially with the sample size. Almost half of the Asian expatriate students in Rauma did answer, and since it's usually hard to get everyone to answer, I won't blame myself too much for this. I am thankful for all of the nine Asian expatriates who took part in my study, without them this study would have been pretty much useless. I am especially thankful for the support, guidance, and encouragement of my supervisor Marina Wikman. During this long and grueling writing process she showed tremendous patience with me, and for that I am grateful.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire

Age:

Sex:

Studies started:

Country:

Pre-departure/arrival questions

1. How did you prepare for moving to Finland?
2. Did you get help from anyone when preparing to go to Finland?
 - I. If yes, from whom?
3. At arrival what kind of help did you get, and from whom?
 - I. For study related issues
 - II. For general issues

Culture related questions

4. What kind of cultural challenges/differences have you met in Finland?
5. What are your challenges in educational issues while studying in Finland?
6. What are the biggest differences between Finnish educational culture and your own?
7. What kind of difficulties have you had in understanding Finnish way of seeing things?
8. Are Finnish ways of doing things very different from your own customs? Have you adapted to Finnish ways, or kept your own customs?

Cultural dimensions

9. What kind of differences have you found in how information is given between Finnish culture and your own?
 - I. In general

II. In university

10. What kind of differences do you see in how direct and clear communication is in Finland compared to your own culture?
11. What kind of differences do you see in how faculty of the university is approached and addressed in Finland compared to your own culture?
12. Do you like to work alone or in a group?

On-site learning/Adaptation

13. How would you describe your social network of friends in Finland?
14. Do you take part in social activities with Finnish people in your free time?
15. Do you still have issues that are hard to understand in Finnish ways of doing things? Are there issues in Finnish customs that you have embraced already?
16. In what kind of situations have you felt:
 - a. loneliness or boredom
 - b. homesickness
 - c. irritated
 - d. social withdrawal
 - e. depression
 - f. excessive sleeping
17. Which of the aforementioned issues affect you the most? (In question 16)

To help future expatriates:

18. What are the main issues future expatriate students should look into and know about Finland before arrival?
19. What would be the important issues to focus on after having arrived in Finland?