

From strangers to friends:
How intercultural friendships develop between mainland Chinese and Hong
Kong students

by

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Statement of Originality

I, LEUNG Yick Wah, hereby declare that I am the first author on all publications presented in this thesis (in the form of a folio); and am responsible for completing each stage of the research project. The material presented in this thesis (in the form of a folio) is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgement. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis (in the form of a folio) and no material in this thesis (in the form of a folio) has been submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

Abstract

Previous intercultural studies suggested that the non-local students who have friendship with locals would show better sociocultural and psychological adaptation in the unfamiliar host-community. Consequently, different researchers examined the intercultural friendship from the communication, psychological and socio-cultural perspective, which offered different lens to explore students' social interaction between cultural groups. Yet, the complicated sociocultural interaction between the sibling cultural groups of mainland Chinese and Hong Kong remain one of the most understudied topics in the field of intercultural friendship study.

Addressing the above research gap, this study adopted Knapp's well-known relational stage model and examined students' perception through a mixed-method approach. One hundred and fifty-nine students at one Hong Kong university have filled in the survey, while twenty-four students have shared their experiences of mainland-Hong Kong friendship in the semi-structured interview. Five studies were conducted in this thesis.

Study one offered an overview on the Mainland-Hong Kong friendship, which examined the correlation between the number of friends, willingness to communicate in the second language and students' satisfaction in the friendship between the mainland and Hong Kong groups. Results revealed that mainland students rated their intercultural friendship higher in terms of the number of friends, satisfaction with the friendship quantity, and the willingness to communicate in the second language on average. Moreover, the willingness to communicate is correlated with students' satisfaction level of intercultural friendship, yet it does not associate with the depth of friendship.

Study two and three focused on the students' perceived challenges and influential factors at different friendship stages. At the beginning of intercultural friendship, study two revealed

that language difference, cultural difference, and the lack of common topics were perceived as the three main challenges. Study three compared students' perception at different friendship stages, which revealed that value differences and seeking common topics were considered as two main concerns of students at all friendship stages. The propinquity was less recognized at the beginning, but it became vital at the advanced stage. By contrast, language differences played a more crucial role at the beginning, yet they faded away gradually at later stages.

Study four explored the students' views about university supports towards friendship network formation and intercultural communication, while the findings revealed different mismatches between the policies and practices, and between students' expectations and university practices.

Study five explored the students' choices of using online social-network and how the mainland-Hong Kong friendship is affected accordingly. The findings revealed that the instant-messaging platform helps students build up a sense of "presence awareness" and strengthens their pre-existing friendship. The social networking site helped students explore their common interests and concurrently revealed values and cultural differences;

This cumulative dissertation sheds light on implications to facilitate intercultural communication and improve student support services at universities, as well as directions for future research. Different from previous friendship studies, this thesis for the first time incorporated variables at different Social-Ecological levels into Knapp's well-known Relational Stage Model, which enriched the literature of intercultural communication and intercultural friendship development with its theoretical and practical implications.

(497 words)

Keywords

Intercultural communication; friendship development; mainland-Hong Kong relationship;
cultural difference, online social network

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List of Abbreviations

AUMT	Anxiety-Uncertainty Management Theory
CDT	Cultural-Distance Theory
EDB	Education Bureau
EdUHK	The Education University of Hong Kong
FTF	Face-to-face
GS	Graduate School
HK	Hong Kong
ICT	Intergroup Contact Theory
IF	Intercultural friendship
IMP	Instant-messaging platform
L2	Second language
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSN	Online social-network
RIT	Retrospective Interview Technique
SEM	Social-Ecological Model
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SPT	Social Penetration Theory
SNS	Social-networking site
SIT	Social Identity Theory
WTC	Willingness to communicate
UGC	University Grants Committee
US	United State

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Aim of the research

Everyone needs friends. As mentioned by Aristotle in his famous work “The Nicomachean Ethics”, “Without friends, no one would want to live, even if he had all other goods” (Ross, 2009, p.4). Although friendship is important for individuals, it is often taken for granted since even a young child can make friends without any guidance. However, the process of friendship formation and development are far more complex than they appear to be.

In contrast to other close relationships (e.g., business connections, parent-child or superior-subordinate relationships), friendship is not an outcome of natural formation, but a personal decision on a voluntary basis (Kudo, Volet, & Whitsed, 2019). Such decisions are often based on a complex mix of rational calculation, personal inclination, and contextual influence. Research about friendship has demonstrated how similarity breeds a connection and liking. Similarity contributes not only to initial attraction, but also the sustainable development of the social bond (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Parker & Seal, 1996). By contrast, dissimilarities between students may challenge the development of intercultural friendships.

In view of the close-knit relationship between the mainland and Hong Kong community, as well as their accelerating integration in the upcoming Greater Bay project, it is expected that more social interaction would be occurred between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong people, which highlighted the importance of building a positive intercultural relationship. Indeed, the integration has been started at the higher education level for years. With the widespread adoption of greater internationalization as a goal, many Hong Kong universities, the locale of the present study, have sought to recruit more non-local students and create a more a multicultural environment. In previous decades, the number of non-local students in Hong

Kong has increased rapidly from 4,773 in 2005/06 to 18,060 in 2018/19, while 68.2% of non-local students (or 12,322 students) are from mainland China (University Grants Committee, 2019). With the large influx of mainland students into Hong Kong universities, there is a need for more empirical research about the intercultural relationship development between mainland and Hong Kong students.

In the past, the intergroup conflict between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong was often underestimated due to their shared cultural heritage and the similar Chinese-character writing system (Mau, 2005). However, recent studies have revealed social and cultural conflicts in different aspects, from living styles (Chiu, 2014) to perceived identity (Lowe & Tsang, 2018; Ngo & Li, 2016), which remains to be unexplored. Since June 2019, the tension between the mainland China and Hong Kong has become more complicated due to prevailing anti-mainland sentiment and social unrest, which further provide practical significance to this study.

In addressing the above concerns, this study aims to explore Mainland-HK friendships, while addressing the core question: “Why could some mainland students develop close-friendship with local peers (or vice-versa), but not others?” This research investigates how individual and contextual factors affect the development of mainland-HK friendships. It also explores how students respond to perceived challenges and develop strategies that support their intercultural friendship development. To the author’s knowledge, this study is the first attempt to specifically examine mainland-HK friendship formation and development by looking into its relationship with different contributing factors in the context of Hong Kong universities.

1.2 Motivation of this research

1.2.1 My personal experience

In the past, several years of collaboration with mainland colleagues aroused my curiosity in examining mainland-HK relationship. I developed close friendships with mainland friends from the time I studied for my master's degree in 2007. Their efforts and insight have changed me considerably in terms of my interests, values and even my personal worldview; on the other hand, most of my local friends do not have a similar outlook as their mainland peers and tend not to form close relationships with them. In other countries, this distance may simply be explained by the language barrier, cultural difference or the lack of self-openness. However, it is insufficient to explain the difficulties of building mainland-HK relationships, especially given that most parents or grandparents of Hong Kong students are originally immigrants from mainland China in the 20th century. It is thus surprising to hear some mainland students saying "Hong Kong is more foreign than a foreign country" (Yu & Zhang, 2016, p. 2).

My experiences made me realize that mainland students might have encountered different difficulties from those they may have faced in foreign countries, or other local students might have perceived difficulties differently from me. This strengthened my motivation to look more closely into how mainland-HK friendships form and develop.

1.2.2 Benefit of individual students

To better support individual students, it is important to explore how mainland-HK friendships develop. In the psychological view, having friendship with locals is of particular importance as they often need to face more psychological and sociocultural stress alone, and receive much less social support from other interpersonal relationships, such as family or relatives, than their local peers. Yeh and Inose's study reported that those students who feel connected to the local social network have significantly lower level of acculturative stress and more successful adjustment (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Regarding academic adaptation of non-local students, the friendship with local peers was also linked to higher host-language proficiency

and better academic performance of non-local students (Ward & Masgoret, 2004) as well as better retention and graduation rates at the university level (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

In the meta-analysis of Pettigrew and Tropp about 500 intergroup studies, intercultural friendship was reported as being a catalyst for intercultural interactions and alleviating intergroup anxiety (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Pettigrew also highlighted the linkage between intercultural friendship and intergroup attitude in his Intergroup-Contact Theory, which proposed that overseas students who have local friends have a lower level of perceived prejudice and more positive intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew, 1998). Pettigrew's idea was reconfirmed by Kim's intercultural study in Korea, which found that having local friendship could encourage non-local students to become more active in participating in local activities, learning more about the local culture and communication system in the host country (Kim, 2001). They also achieve stronger language skills and social skills with locals (Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Moreover, intercultural friendship can enrich the multicultural experience of local students by increasing intercultural knowledge and acceptance (Todd & Nesdale, 1997).

In local studies, encouraging cross-cultural friendships is also reported as the key element of internationalization in Hong Kong universities. As mentioned by University Grants Committee UGC, Hong Kong students are "too inward-looking... know too little about the outside world (and indeed show insufficient curiosity about it) to be ready to contribute to the kind of globalising economy in which Hong Kong must find its place" (University Grants Council (UGC), 2010, p. 57).

1.2.3 Benefit of universities and wider society

Arguably, the recruitment of non-local students increases student diversity, although it does not guarantee that universities can establish a completely multi-cultural environment for the students. Previous studies have reported that universities can help local and mainland students

initiate relationships; however, developing close relationships among the members of the two groups of students after becoming acquaintances is not common (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011). Thus, there is a need to examine the role of the university, in terms of how it can facilitate intercultural interactions and help students integrate with each other, rather than co-exist in the same campus without interaction.

On a broader social level, mainland-HK friendship can help to develop a sense of belonging among mainland students. It has been reported that overseas students who gained local support were able to develop a sense of belonging, which attracted them to stay after graduating (Ward, Masgoret, & Gezentsvey, 2009). This support could be considered as a reference for formulating intercultural integration policies to prevent the outflow of talent, and improve the overall competitiveness of Hong Kong. Moreover, this study of mainland-HK friendship has the potential to offer insight into how mainland and Hong Kong people interact with each other, especially in light of growing tension between the two in recent years.

1.3 Contextualizing the problem: What we know so far?

1.3.1 Definition of friendship and intercultural friendship

In the literature, friendship is generally agreed to be a combination of affection, love, trust and respect. Different from other interpersonal relationship, friendship is a voluntary, symmetrical, and interpersonal relationship in which the participants respond to one another personally (Beer, 2001). However, there is no consensus among researchers regarding how people make decisions about friendship development in the process. It is far more complex than they appear to be, and its definition and the experience involved in friendship formation would vary from person to person. In the field of friendship study, most researchers focused on exploring the concept and meaning of “friends” as perceived by people from different cultural backgrounds (Fischer, 1977), the expectation of self and others in intercultural

friendship (Beer, 2001; Policarpo, 2015), or the expected response and behavior from others in the intercultural friendship (Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

From previous studies, it is observed that two major features of friendship are responsible to make interpersonal relationship unique and attractive: (i) friendship as similarity; and (ii) friendship as expectation.

Friendship as similarity

Regarding individual choice, friendship is defined as a voluntary, symmetrical, and interpersonal relationship in which the participants respond to one another personally (Beer, 2001; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). In this aspect, friendship is a voluntary selection between people that has less concern about if it brings additional societal support than other interpersonal relationship. The attractiveness of friendship is mainly dependent on the perceived similarity between each other desirable personality traits of others, such as kindness, attractive appearance, or shared commonality.

In previous years, different researchers tried to seek the universal nature of friendship development, while it often involved the discussion of the mutual similarity above. This emphasis of similarity can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (“similarity begets friendship”) and Aristotle (people “love those who are like themselves”) (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010).

In the field of socio-psychological studies, the extent of similarity appears to vary across friendship. In the classroom, for example, similarity to one’s friend on academic performance would be more influential among students who put the academic performance in their top-priority.

The discussion about the role of similarity has been described in two ways: Similarity served as (i) the basis of attraction (Similarity is a selection effect), or (ii) as the result of interactions between friends (similarity due to socialization).

The theorists in the social psychology tend to focus on the first view and proposed different concepts to explain how similarity breeds friendship, such as homogeneity principle (McPherson et al, 2001) or in-group favouritism (Aronson et al, 2010; Giles & Ryan, 1982). Homophily-principle suggested that people are more likely to make friends with those who shared some similarity in different fields, such as demographic background (e.g. age, gender, socio-economic status), value and belief, common interest, and aesthetic judgment of taste (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Parker & Seal, 1996). In-group favouritism focused on the interaction at the intergroup level, which is frequently used to explain the formation of bias, discrimination, or prejudice (Brewer, 1999). It refers to a tendency to favour similar others (e.g. same ethnicity, social class, or come from the same regional or national origin) via the attribution of more positive traits, more rewards, or more positive social identity (Brewer, 1999, Ryan & Giles, 1982).

In this view, cultural dissimilarities (or cultural difference) are considered as challenges of friendship development, while the researchers made different models to predict the level of acculturation and prepare for it. For example, Ward's study (1996) developed the Affect, Behavior, Cognition (ABC) model (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005), which helps overseas students better prepare the possible cultural shock in the host-culture. On the other hand, Hofstede focused on the intercultural comparison, which categorized "cultural difference" into six dimensions on the basis of the exploring IBM employee's value from more than 70 countries (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede further proposed the Cultural-Distance Theory (CDT), which suggested that people from countries with a cultural distance far away from the host country would encounter more challenges in processing and categorizing their identity

(Hofstede, 2001). Addressing the cultural-identity conflict in specific interactions, some researchers proposed their idea to better manage the conflict, such as unidimensional assimilation model (which assumed that immigrants must eventually accept all aspects of the host-society) or Acculturation Theory (Berry, 2005) (which suggested four acculturation strategies for coping with different acculturative stresses).

In recent years, however, some researchers started to argue that cultural difference is not always as negative as it is perceived to be. In Lee's study about 15 intercultural friendship dyads, for example, it is reported that the students are appreciated with the cultural difference as it allows them to compare different points of view with respect to the same issue (Lee, 2006). Sias's study (2008) about non-local students also reported that the language and cultural differences serve as the source for building their "integrated identity". The students would use slang or specific terms in their dialect to develop their "secret language", which distinguishes their specific friendship from others. In other words, some personality traits may be less desirable to certain friendship stages, but it could be perceived as the "attractiveness" to others.

Friendship as expectation

Different from the similarity (or difference) of others, the aspect of expectation focused on the individual expectation. In this view, the decision of making friends is not about the attractive traits of others, but whether the friendship would fulfil certain expectations which individuals developed. This view could be best represented by Emerson's Social Exchange Theory (SET), which defined friendship as the outcome of rational cost-benefit calculation. Emerson suggested that only the relationship that could maximize our benefits and minimize our cost would be chosen and developed into friendship (Emerson, 1976; Ramirez, Sunnafrank et al., 2010). Emerson's idea is partially overlapped with the reciprocity principle in social psychology, which refers to "in which giving and taking are to be repaid in equivalent measure" (Keysar et al, 2008, p.1281) during intercultural interaction. In other

words, friendship is an outcome of a cost-benefit analysis of social interaction, while its development is dependent on whether the relationship matches the subjective expectation of future benefit (or loss). Apparently, “similar others” may not have an advantage as they could not provide much benefit or inspiration.

Emerson’s SET also serves as the basis of some friendship theories, such as Taylor and Altman’s social penetration theory (SET). SET also holds an instrumental view and assumes that the friendship advancement is dependent on the expected amount and nature of the interpersonal rewards, yet such benefit is more about the fulfilment of personal social needs and support, rather than the substantial benefit (Taylor & Altman, 1987).

To summarize, it is generally agreed that friendship is a voluntary interpersonal relationship, while its voluntary and spontaneous natures distinguish it from other compulsory and asymmetrical relationships (e.g., parent-child or supervisor-subordinate) (Beer, 2001; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). However, the individual decision of developing friendship is based on a complex mix of personal inclination (Similarity-oriented) and rational calculation (Expectation-oriented), which awaits further study. Compared with intracultural friendships, intercultural counterparts are far more complicated as they are characterized by individual differences between cultural background, values, and belief (Lee, 2006).

Addressing the above concerns, study 2 and 3 would explore students’ decision and expectations about friendship development. Study 2 to 5 would also reveal how mainland and local students explored the unexpected socio-cultural difference (or similarity) between each other and examine how their interaction strengthens the mainland-HK friendship during the process.

1.3.2 Major theories about friendship studies

The previous section has introduced the definition of friendship studies in different perspectives, yet they did not directly address the core questions: “How does the friendship form and develop?” In this regard, four theories serve as the starting points to guide this study and provided four illustrations regarding the mechanism of friendship formation and development. They include: (i) Social Exchange Theory (SET); (ii) Social Penetration Theory (SPT); (iii) Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT); and (iv) Social Identity Theory (SIT).

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is firstly proposed to explain why we choose to start and develop a certain relationship. It is suggested that the friendship that maximizes our benefits and minimizes our cost will be chosen and developed (Emerson, 1976). It offers an economic view for explaining the relationship development, where the satisfaction level of relationship is the result of comparison between expected rewards (Positive component, e.g. partner’s good traits, physical attractiveness or any pleasurable resource) and cost (Negative component, e.g. partner’s negative traits, or any resource which results in a feeling of loss or punishment) (Emerson, 1976; McGraw et al., 2003). In recent studies, the comparison of the benefit and cost has been further extended to the comparison between loneliness and having friendship. For example, people may compare the outcome of being alone and maintaining the superficial relationship, while the lowest level of acceptable relational rewards will be their key concern (Thibaut and Kelley, 2008).

SET guided different studies about intercultural friendship formation and the reason behind.

Huang’s study (2008) about non-local Chinese students’ friendship in US universities, for

example, reported that local friendship is viewed as a social resource to help non-local students to overcome the challenges in their adaptation. Huang suggested that “helping” and “learning” are two main functions of local friendship development in the view of Chinese students, and therefore all Chinese students tend to pay attention to whether a friend is willing to offer help, or they can learn something from their friends at the very beginning. Huang’s idea is consistent with other friendship studies. For example, Yeh & Inose’s study (2003) also reported that local social support received from intercultural interaction can help non-local to deal with different life problems.

On the other hand, SET tried to explain how intercultural friendship could benefit local students as well. Todd & Nesdale (1997), for example, reported that intercultural contact can enrich the experience of host nationals by facilitating an international outlook through the increase in intercultural knowledge and acceptance. Similarly, Al-Sharideh & Goe (1998) found that intercultural friendship can help both local and non-local students build up their global self-esteem, while Hendrickson (2011) also suggested that intercultural friendship can enhance the local student’s understanding of other cultures through intelligence exchange, social interaction and discussion.

Although SET is widely adopted in previous studies, the assumption of SET is frequently questioned by many researchers. Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) suggested that there is something special and unique in every friendship, where the friendship is not governed by,

and cannot be explained by economic principles or simple reward-cost calculation. Also, SET is not able to explain some friendship behaviour, such as why people would make certain self-sacrifice in friendship, or maintain the friendship that brings them down (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Wood, 1997).

Social Penetration Theory (SPT)

In 1987, Altman and Taylor proposed the Social Penetration Theory (SPT) in their well-known article “Communication in interpersonal relationships: Social penetration processes” (Altman and Taylor, 1987). In SPT, the key concept “self-disclosure” is highlighted as an indicator of friendship stages by two dimensions: (i) Breadth of self-disclosure and (ii) Depth of self-disclosure (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009), while social penetration refers to the degree of intimacy that guides topic of self-disclosure. Altman and Taylor used the “onion” metaphor to describe the process of disclosing public self (outside layer) and personal selves (core) to others, which later served as idea of stage-sequence to explain the friendship development process.

On the other hand, the self-disclosure also serves as a contributing factor for friendship development as it could strengthen the bonds you share, build trust, and improve the overall quality of the relationship by increasing the level of comfort and confidence in one another via interpersonal communication (Adler & Proctor, 2007; Altman & Taylor, 1973). SPT holds a similar view with SET, which assumes that the friendship advancement is dependent on the expected amount and nature of the interpersonal rewards yet such benefit is more about the fulfilment of personal social needs and support, rather than the substantial benefit (Taylor & Altman, 1987).

The idea of SPT is widely applied to the interpersonal interaction with different cultural-identity and belief (Bolton & Luke, 1999; Mau, 2005; Pennington, 1998), while it is extended to the studies about online communication in recent years, such as the comparison of self-disclosure topics in different digital platforms and the real context (Part et al, 2014; Pennington, 2008; Tosun, 2012), or the online self-disclosure content without expectation of reciprocal feedback (Song et al, 2016).

Intergroup contact theory (ICT)

In the field of socio-psychological study, Allport's Intergroup contact theory (ICT) is often adopted to explain the contextual impact on individuals. ICT suggested that increasing intercultural contact is a way to enhance mutual understanding, diminish prejudice and bias (Allport, 1954; Binder et al., 2009). In this view, intercultural communication is a data collection process for better mutual understanding and help the individual to seek information to predict others (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). It is often linked with the uncertainty reduction theory, which suggested that people always need the information of others to reduce their uncertainty and predict other's behaviour (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; West & Turner, 2010).

Following the idea of ICT, the importance of intercultural friendship is highlighted as helping people prepare for the intergroup interaction with out-group members. For example, Page-Gould et al's study in the US reported that intercultural friendship could serve as a catalyst for intercultural interaction and alleviate the intergroup anxiety in advance (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008). It is also reported in different studies that overseas students with local friendship will have a lower level of perceived prejudice and more positive intergroup attitudes when they try to integrate themselves in the host-community (Pettigrew, 1997; 1998). Such understanding and attitude are important for non-local to integrate into the host society. Moreover, the frequent intercultural contact could lead to more active engagement of non-local students to the daily interaction with locals, so that they could

better master the culture and communication system in the host country (Kim, 2001), and develop stronger language skills (Ward & Masgoret, 2004), as well as better social skills with locals (Li, 2010).

The weakness of ICT, however, is also clear as it only discussed how to provide a good foundation for establishing an intercultural relationship, instead of resolving the conflict. More interaction or understanding cannot resolve every conflict, especially those originating from deep-rooted beliefs, values, or world-view differences.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social Identity Theory (SIT) seeks to explain the process of developing identity between members in intercultural friendship. It is firstly purposed by Tajfel (1981), which suggested that the “social identification” is a cognitive process about how people categorize and culturally identify themselves and others, while it will directly drive their intercultural behaviour. For example, individuals with strong home-cultural identity tend to initiate relationships with those with a similar background (e.g. values, attitudes, beliefs, age, ethnicity or religion), which is known as the homophily principle (McPherson et al., 2001).

In empirical studies, SIT is often inked with other communication theories to explore the intercultural interaction. For example, Adler and Proctor (2007) linked the identity to self-disclosure and suggested that the self-disclosure could be considered a self-promoting strategy for showing certain social desirable personality and increasing our influence over others. Ting-Toomey (2005) developed an identity-negotiation theory on the basis of Tajfel’s idea, which suggested that individuals may create or evoke the desired identity through mindful communication. Five identity dimensions (e.g. security/vulnerability, predictability/unpredictability) are suggested to be the influential factors of communication behaviour among different cultures (Ting-Toomey, 2005). On the other hand, some psychological concepts, such as the self-perceived discrimination (Berry & Sabatier, 2010),

subjective stereotype, anti-immigrant ideas varying among the targeted cultural-groups or contexts (Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver, 2003; Hopkins, 2010), are often involved when examining the development of social identity.

Compared with other theories, the awareness of cultural identity is the core of SIT. It is often reflected in the issues about language choice or the cultural attitude towards the particular cultural group. It is worth noting that cultural identity is hard to be perceived under normal circumstances. Most often, the adjustment of identity only occurs when the individual faces challenges during the intercultural contact, such as the identity disorientation state of cultural shock (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

1.3.3 Major directions of previous friendship studies

Previous research about the intercultural friendship development mainly followed three major directions:

Direction 1: Factors of friendship development

The first cluster is concerned with different individual and environmental factors affecting friendship interaction. The researchers in this cluster mainly focused on how non-local people adapt to the specific context (e.g. university setting) and host society. For example, Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre (2003) examined the intercultural relationship of 378 students in a Canadian bilingual university. Their study reported that the individual (local-language proficiency and confidence) and social factors (subjective norm) were all important determinants of L2 use, while the subjective norms moderated the relationship between L2 confidence and identity of non-local students.

Clement's study highlighted the importance of language and context in intergroup communication, which is further reconfirmed by Garies (2011). Garies's study about the local friendship experience of 454 international students in the US suggested that the satisfaction

level with locals of intercultural students is dependent on their host-language proficiency (English). On the other hand, international students fared better in the South than the Northeast US, and better in non-metropolitan than metropolitan areas.

In Hong Kong, some local researchers strived to identify different individual or environmental factors about intercultural friendship development. For example, Ruan and Zhu's study (2015) explored the socio-cultural adaptation experience of 209 mainland students in the Baptist University. Their study concluded that only 18% of the mainland students have local friendship, where 90% of the students are locals in the university campus. Four cultural differences (language barrier, differences in values and ideologies, differences in academic orientation and future-plan) are found to be the main discouraging factors of the intergroup friendship formation. Yu and Zhang (2016) also invited 54 mainland students to share their perceived difficulties about their socio-adaptation difficulties in the qualitative interview. Their findings also confirmed the importance of linguistic adaptation and cultural difference, while Yu's study further provided more detailed description about the difference in students' values and ideologies in political identification and perceived discrimination in daily life.

The above literatures offered valuable reference to this thesis. Yet, most of them have been conducted from the viewpoint of the acculturating groups (e.g. international or mainland students), yet little attention is being paid to the perspective of majority or local students in the receiving community towards the acculturation groups. It is of utmost importance in the study of intercultural friendship as it always takes two people to make it work. It is not enough to view the one-side perspective and solely give suggestions to the non-local groups without exploring another side of the same story from the local perspective.

Direction 2: Theories and concepts about friendship development

The second cluster tends to apply or verify theories or concepts in the field of socio-psychology or interpersonal friendship development. Different theories have their own assumptions and

explanations about friendship development. Emerson's Social-Exchange Theory (SET), for example, offers an economic view to explain friendship development and suggests that the choice of friendship development is a result of the cost-benefit calculation (Emerson, 1976). On the other hand, Social-Identification Theory adopts the socio-cognitive approach which investigates how people build up their own social identity and value the distinctiveness of different cultural groups (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Tajfel, 1981). Based on different assumptions and study focuses, the researchers further proposed different concepts, such as social-penetration (Chen and Nakazawa, 2012), social or cultural identity (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Hou & McDowell, 2014), social exchange (Dunne, 2013) or social network (Rienties and Nolan, 2014).

The studies in this approach may integrate with cluster one and discuss the related variables about intercultural friendship development. Sias and her colleagues (2008), for example, interviewed 30 non-local students about their intercultural friendship experience, which reported that the language barrier and cultural similarities (and difference) only exert influence in the "Acquaintance-to-friend" stage, while prior intercultural experience and advanced host-language usage (accent or idiom) are associated with the development in "friend to close friend" and "close friend to best friend" stages. Chen and Nagkazawa (2012) integrated SPT and explored the self-disclosure topics of 172 sojourns in Taiwan. The findings reported that the effect of cultural backgrounds and patterns of self-disclosure is dependent on the degree of friendship. Recent studies put the attention to the context and highlight the environmental influences. Kudo's study, for example, proposed three types of environmental affordances: (i) institutional proximity; (ii) interpersonal proximity; and (iii) individualized proximity, which are expected to perform different types of functions (Functional, instrumental or personal) in friendship development (Kudo et al, 2019).

In sum, the studies in this direction follow different theoretical frameworks to explore the impact of particular factors for predicting successful intercultural friendship.

Direction 3: Interventions to facilitate friendship development

The third cluster of previous studies sheds light on the effectiveness of engineered or designed interventions in institutional or instructional settings, such as the peer-mentor programme (Menzies, Baron, & Zutshi, 2015), extra-curricular activities (Hendrickson, 2018), recreation (Glass, Gomez & Urzua, 2014) and multicultural intervention programme (Sakurai, McCall-Wolf & Kashima, 2010). Most discussions about these intervention studies are theoretically grounded in the Social-Identification Theory or Intergroup-Contact Theory, which propose that regular and frequent intercultural interaction can help individuals gain more understanding about each other and reduce intergroup bias. Researchers of this cluster also examined how common goals and membership help individuals build up relational identities (Hendrickson, 2018). However, only a few studies have addressed the effectiveness of university initiatives or the manager's view about why they do so.

1.4 Research gaps and the research questions

1.4.1 Friendship formation: The missing voice of the majority

In the past, most intercultural studies have focused on non-local students' perspectives, relying on their perceptions about intergroup relations or interaction experience with particular local friends. Although the views of local students are equally important as they shape immigrants' opportunities to befriend natives in the first place, very few studies have addressed the view of locals, as well as their choice and motivation of making non-local friends.

This shortcoming is particularly notable in the friendship choices among local students, which have been guided by the incompatible cultural values (Yu & Zhang, 2016), social norms and habits (Chiu, 2014; Xie, 2009), classroom culture (Xie, 2009), language barrier and low

willingness to communicate (WTC) in Putonghua (Ding & Stapleton, 2016; Xie, 2009) when interacting with mainland peers. These findings are in line with the first cluster, which states that the lack of intercultural communication competence can inhibit intercultural friendship development. Still, few studies have investigated, let alone demonstrated, how students with successful friendships with mainland peers have overcome such barriers, or how likely they are to befriend mainland students.

In conclusion, most research on friendship between non-local and local students has not accounted for the perspective of both parties, nor has the potential selection mechanism been disentangled.

1.4.2 What are the underlying processes at different friendship stages?

Although some research has identified the factors for friendship development, most studies have focused on a particular type of interaction (e.g., group work) in a particular context or at a certain time, instead of paying explicit attention to its potential for change or the evolution of interactional foci. Previous studies have found that students emphasize different concerns, conversation topics or have different communication behavior at different friendship stages. For example, language differences are frequently reported to be the main barrier of friendship formation (Mori, 2000; Yu and Shen, 2012). However, Sias's study reported that minor differences between languages can be a catalyst of intercultural friendship development and facilitate more communication at the advanced level (Sias et al, 2008).

Second, most findings about the quality of intercultural relationships is rather inconsistent or fragmented. For example, simple relational terms, such as “friendship” are used (Kudo et al, 2019) instead of focusing on the intercultural variations in students' definitions and expectations about the relationship. Also, most researchers tend to concentrate on examining single factors in each study, such as communicative competence (Gareis et al., 2011), and

home and host regions (Gareis, 2012). However, few studies have investigated how long-lasting, consolidated intercultural relationships are established and maintained. In fact, it is generally agreed that there is no single factor or solution for developing intercultural friendships. Although published studies offer a useful reference for discussion, there is a need to focus on how different factors interact with each other during dynamic social interaction.

1.4.3 Underestimated challenges of mainland-HK friendship

Intercultural friendship is found to be a fluid and multidimensional process, while various environmental (e.g., proximity, curricula, policy) and individual (e.g., personality, anxiety, language skills, past international experience) factors come into play interactively (Kudo et al. 2019). However, intergroup conflict between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong is often underestimated due expectations about their shared cultural heritage and the similar Chinese-character writing system (Mau, 2005).

At the individual level, incompatible beliefs and values often emerge when mainland and Hong Kong students worked together on common tasks, such as student activities or project assignments (Chiu, 2014). Chiu's study about students in The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) (2014) further reported that such cognitive differences also extended to their socio-political views, in terms of values about voting and the study-life balance. At the social level, previous researchers suggested that the colonial history of Hong Kong cemented the sense of a separate identity "Hongkongese" and led to the identity conflict with other Chinese at the post-colonial age (Lee, 2019). Culturally speaking, the hybrid culture of Hong Kong, with dominant Chinese culture mixed with British elements, has differentiated it from mainland China (Siu, 1996). Although the "One Country, Two Systems" policy was proposed to ensure the reunification with "motherland" from which it had been politically, economically and socially estranged, it has resulted in an "accommodation of differences rather than a wholehearted embrace" (Adamson & Lee, 2004, p.35). The recent social unrest has

nonetheless stirred up anti-mainland sentiments in Hong Kong; thus, it is surprising that researchers have not paid much attention to the dynamic aspects of intergroup relations between the mainland and Hong Kong.

1.4.4 How exactly is environmental influence supposed to work?

Although previous studies have identified the contributing factors of friendship development, they have been heavily context-dependent, where the specific context of Hong Kong is worth further investigation. In most studies outside of Asia, non-local students have often been considered as a “vulnerable” population in terms of social status, political power, and cultural prestige” (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). Since China has experienced rapid economic growth in the past decades, mainland China has gathered economic and political power over Hong Kong, which has created a complicated power imbalance between the local-community and mainlanders (Yu & Watkins, 2008).

Local students in Hong Kong are now more likely to feel inferior as they have become worried about the increasing competition for limited school places and employment, especially when their mother-tongue (Cantonese) does not bring many advantages in their future employment (Chiu, 2014). Lee and Chow (2018) have suggested that the attitude towards mainland Chinese among local Hong Kong people is related to sociotropic concern, in which people reshape their identities and socio-political view around a sense of “us-versus-them”. More importantly, such concerns are more prevalent among students who have a strong Hong Kong identity. The tension between mainland and Hong Kong students has worsened since the Anti-Extradition Protest in June 2019, which has brought this tension between the two groups to the surface affecting students’ attitudes towards each other’s group, including their willingness to develop friendships.

1.4.5 Research questions

This thesis aims to answer the core question: “Why could some mainland students develop close-friendship with local peers (or vice-versa), but not others?” This question is broken down into different sub-questions according to the nature of investigation.

Article 1. The first article is the opening chapter, which aims to give an overview about the status of mainland-HK friendships including several variables. Arguably, all relationships, including intercultural friendships, start with good communication, which primarily relies on whether interlocutors can overcome the language barrier. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the correlation between the friendship-outcome, demographic (i.e., age, gender and level of study) and communication-related variables (i.e., language proficiency, willingness to communicate (WTC) in the second-language (L2) (Clément et al., 2003; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Yu & Watkins, 2010). To my knowledge, there is no local study that provides a comprehensive overview of the relationship between mainland-HK friendships, including language-related and demographic variables. Thus, the following research questions (RQs) are proposed:

RQ1: What is the friendship satisfaction level between mainland and Hong Kong students?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the willingness to communicate in one's interlocutor's language and the number of mainland / local friends one has made including the satisfaction level of that friendship?

RQ3: What is the relationship between the perceived language proficiency in one's interlocutor's language and the number of mainland-HK friends one has made including the satisfaction level of that friendship?

RQ4: How do the demographic factors (e.g. gender, age, and length of stay) affect the willingness to communicate, the number of mainland-HK friends one has made

including the satisfaction level of that friendship?

Article 2. Regarding intercultural friendship formation, most intercultural studies have involved non-local students from other non-English speaking countries with high cultural distance (Peng, 2006; Vaccarino & Dresler-Hawke, 2011; Yu & Shen, 2012). Therefore, investigating whether and how mainland and Hong Kong students, with the same language system and cultural history, perceive challenges and benefits in the mainland-HK friendship suggests a research gap. Notably, many studies have reported there are large and often underestimated identity and cultural differences between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong (Mau, 2005). Accordingly, this study aims to explore the kinds of challenges perceived by mainland and Hong Kong students at the friendship formation stage. Thus, my RQs in the second article are:

RQ2-1. What expectations do mainland and Hong Kong students have on each other within their friendship?

RQ2-2. What are the perceived challenges of intercultural friendship formation between mainland and Hong Kong students?

RQ2-3. How do these challenges affect interactions between mainland and Hong Kong students?

Article 3. Addressing the complexity of social interactions at different friendship stages, this study also explores which social factors are perceived by students and why certain factors exert more influence at particular phase(s) of the friendship, but not others. The third research question is thus proposed:

RQ3: What are the key facilitating and inhibiting factors at different friendship stages among mainland and Hong Kong students?

Article 4. Most friendship studies have focused on individual attributes, competence or perception in the relationship development process, while the impact of the environment has not been systematically explored. Taking reference from the multi-level framework in the Social-Ecological Approach, the following questions are proposed:

RQ4-1. In the student's view, what school's initiative is considered as the effective (or ineffective) with regard to the mainland-HK friendship development?

RQ4-2. How does the above school initiative contribute to the development of mainland-HK friendship?

Article 5. In the past, the rapid development of the Internet provided an alternative communication platform between students, yet there is no common consensus on whether and how it affects intercultural friendship development in both virtual and physical contexts.

RQ5-1. Is there any correlation between the use of online social-networks, number of intercultural friends, and the level of satisfaction with mainland-HK friendships?

Second, the literature suggests that instant-messaging platforms and social-networking sites play a role in facilitating interpersonal communication; thus, this study investigates whether they play a similar supporting role in the mainland-HK friendship development. Addressing this concern, two research questions are proposed below:

RQ5-2. What role do instant-messaging platforms (IMP) play in the development of mainland-Hong Kong (HK) friendships?

RQ5-3. What role do social-networking sites (SNS) play in the development of mainland-Hong Kong (HK) friendships?

The impact of the Internet on social cohesion has attracted increasing attention from researchers in recent years. Researchers have shown their concern about whether the online

space would be politicalized and amplified value conflicts between individuals, known as “echo-chamber effect.” Since there has been rapid growth of tension between mainland-China and Hong Kong after the recent Anti-Extradition Protest, the tension between two groups has rapidly increased. Accordingly, examining whether and how the Internet affects this intergroup conflict, including mainland-HK friendships is addressed with the following research question:

RQ5-4. How do mainland and Hong Kong students perceive and respond to conflicting views on SNS?

1.5 Methodology

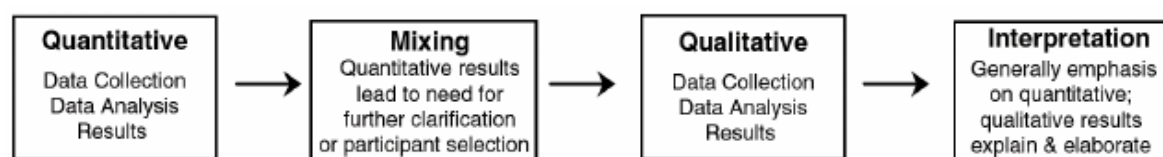
This section introduces the research paradigm and presents the overall research design (sampling, data collection and analysis) of this thesis. It describes the methods used in data collection and analysis, why these methods were adopted and how the methods were used in practice. This chapter also illustrates how data was kept reliable and valid.

1.5.1 Research Design

This thesis aims to answer the core questions “Why could some mainland students develop close-friendship with local peers (or vice-versa), but not others?” To obtain the most comprehensive picture of mainland-HK friendships, this study adopted a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (See Figure 1), collecting quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study.

Figure 1

Flow of explanatory mixed-method design for this research (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p.5)



Quantitative data and their subsequent analysis first offer a general overview of the research problem, while the qualitative data and analysis are used to refine and explain the statistical findings by exploring individuals' views in depth (Creswell, 2008). A mixed-method design is chosen because of the following reasons:

First, compared with purely quantitative or qualitative research, the mixed-method design allows more choice for researchers to answer research questions and is less restricted by the methodology (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods are available offsetting their weaknesses at the same time. The quantitative survey provides the magnitude of trends and frequencies for describing general trends (Creswell, 2009), while not being effective in collecting rich detail or uncovering the origin of individual ideas. Addressing this weakness, the qualitative interviews validate or expand on the quantitative findings. In the discussion, the combined data allows meanings to be unpacked and explanations developed to generate ideas, concepts and theories (Ritchie, 2003).

Second, mixed-method designs enable a more accurate purposive sampling from the targeted population. Using a survey, the researcher can first do purposive sampling by inviting the representatives from each distilled theme or conceptual categories, and then compare and contrast quantitative statistical findings (Creswell, Klassen, Clark, & Smith, 2011).

Third, mix-method designs provide multiple data sources for methodological triangulation and enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. On the one hand, they allow researchers to cross-check the data, which minimizes the subjective bias of both researchers and interviewees (Creswell, 2009). On the other hand, they reduce the risk that the conclusion may reflect only systematic biases or limitations of a specific method, which could unintendedly be shaped by the researcher's experience (Creswell, 2008).

1.5.2 Sampling

Sampling strategy. At the quantitative stage, participants were recruited by convenient sampling, which is on the basis of their availability and willingness to respond. It is often used in studies of broadly defined populations (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012), e.g., Hong Kong and mainland Chinese. The invitation email and online questionnaire were sent to all postgraduate and undergraduate students in a medium-sized Hong Kong university, while students who meeting the sampling criteria were all invited to fill in the online survey.

At the qualitative stage, purposive and snowball sampling were used. The participants were randomly selected from each friendship stage and were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview. At the end of the interview, I would ask the interviewee to refer my study to their intercultural friend(s) on a voluntary basis. Snowball sampling was adopted here for two reasons:

First, snowball sampling can help the researcher contact hard-to-reach populations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Since it is frequently reported that intercultural friendships are difficult to develop, snowball sampling can thus help the researcher to directly approach those students with successful intercultural friendships.

Second, participants recruited from chain referrals have a higher level of initial trust towards the researcher, which enables them to have deeper disclosure about their personal beliefs or viewpoints on sensitive topics (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). This was especially important in this study because it involved a large amount of subjective judgment and hidden views of individuals on sensitive topics. For privacy reasons, it is worth noting that the participants did not necessarily attend the interviews in pairs. Those who came as a dyad were treated as two individuals and remained independent in this study.

Third, all participants were recruited from a medium-sized Hong Kong university. It is because: (i) First, it could improve the data validity through data triangulation in the same context; (ii) Second, due to my study and working background, I am more familiar with this school context. It allows me to be more sensitive to students' sharing and ask more meaningful follow-up questions to gain deeper insight; (iii) Third, since the participants and I come from the same background, it serves as the foundation of building good rapport in the interview. It is most important for this qualitative study, which may involve the subjective sharing of sensitive topics or less socially desirable view on others.

Sampling criteria. In this study, all participants were required to fulfil the following criteria: (i) being enrolled in a full-time undergraduate or postgraduate programme; (ii) have been living in Hong Kong for more than twelve months; (iii) arrived in Hong Kong less than six months before the programme started (for mainland students only); (iv) considered that their intercultural friendship is more than having an “acquaintance” status; and (v) the friendship is not a romantic relationship. It was assumed that students with study periods of over twelve months should have had enough peer-interaction and sufficient data for analysis. On the other hand, the non-romantic friendship restriction ensured that the reported experience would have a less emotional bias.

In this study, “mainland Chinese” was considered as a single analyzing unit in the “place of origin”. Although the mainland China is a huge country with different provinces and sub-cultures, most groupings of cross-cultural comparison studies consider the ethnic group as a stronger entity than matters related to geographical distance (Kim, 2001). Ethnic group strength refers to whether “an ethnic group can offer its members an ethnicity-based subculture within the larger host environment” (Kim, 2001, p. 81), e.g., all Chinese students from different provinces share the same official language, have similar growing environment and cultivation practices. This category has been widely used in different studies about overseas Chinese, such

as Lin's study (2002) in the US, which reconfirmed that Chinese students would choose similar topics for self-disclosure with local peers, no matter which province they came from.

Sampling size. The survey invitation was sent to all students through mass-email in spring 2018; the email was drafted in both English, Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese. Finally, one hundred and fifty-nine students completed the survey:

Table 1

Background information of the survey participant (N=159)

	Number of Hong Kong students	Number of mainland students
Initiating stage (From stranger to acquaintance)	24	12
Experimenting stage (From Acquaintance to friend)	54	22
Intensifying stage (From friend to close friend)	21	12
Integrating stage (From close friend to best friend)	7	7

Under normal circumstances, interviews should be continued until data saturation is achieved (Ritchie, 2003). Due to time and resource limits, however, there is a need to bring the sample volume down to a manageable size. Regarding the sample size of qualitative study, Ritchie (2003) suggested that data management can be too complicated if the number of interviewee is over 50 (Ritchie, 2003). Saunders and her colleagues (2018) further suggested that most new themes would be generated within the first 10 interviews. After considering the research workload, this study planned to conduct the interview with 24 students (12 Hong Kong and 12 Mainland students), while two additional interviews were conducted later, which helps researchers ensure and confirm that there are no new themes emerging. The background information of all interviewees is listed below:

Table 2*Background information of the interviewee*

Code	Place of origin	Gender	Subject Discipline	Friendship stage (#)
HK-A-01	HK	Female	English	Initiating stage
HK-A-02	HK	Female	Information and Communication Technology	Initiating stage
HK-A-03	HK	Male	Chinese History	Initiating stage
HK-B-01	HK	Female	Chinese	Experimenting stage
HK-B-02	HK	Female	Business	Experimenting stage
HK-B-03	HK	Female	General Studies	Experimenting stage
HK-C-01	HK	Female	English	Intensifying stage
HK-C-02	HK	Male	English	Intensifying stage
HK-C-03	HK	Male	Psychology	Intensifying stage
HK-D-01	HK	Female	English	Integrating stage
HK-D-02	HK	Female	Early Childhood Education	Integrating stage
HK-D-03	HK	Female	Early Childhood Education	Integrating stage
ML-A-01	Mainland	Female	English	Initiating stage
ML-A-02	Mainland	Female	English	Initiating stage
ML-A-03	Mainland	Female	English	Initiating stage
ML-B-01	Mainland	Female	English	Experimenting stage
ML-B-02	Mainland	Female	English	Experimenting stage
ML-B-03	Mainland	Female	Education Policy & Management	Experimenting stage
ML-B-04	Mainland	Male	Sport Sciences	Experimenting stage
ML-B-05	Mainland	Female	Early Childhood Education	Experimenting stage
ML-C-01	Mainland	Female	Accountancy	Intensifying stage
ML-C-02	Mainland	Male	English	Intensifying stage
ML-C-03	Mainland	Female	Education Policy & Management	Intensifying stage
ML-C-04	Mainland	Female	General Studies	Intensifying stage
ML-D-01	Mainland	Female	English	Integrating stage
ML-D-02	Mainland	Female	Early Childhood	Integrating stage

Note.

Initiating stage: Stranger-to-acquaintance

Experimenting stage: Acquaintance-to-friend

Intensifying stage: Friend-to-close friend

Integrating stage: Close friend-to-best-friend

1.5.3 Data collection and process

The Pilot study. Before the main phase of data collection, the interview protocol was drafted with reference to three studies: Chen's friendship study between Taiwanese and Chinese students (2016), Sias's intercultural studies of college students (2008) and Huang's friendship study about Chinese students in the United State (2008). It was then pilot-tested on two students in June 2017, who were purposefully selected from those who had completed the drafted survey. Based on the student's feedback and interview analysis, I slightly revised the wordings of the protocol questions and developed an additional probing sheet. For example, in the original interview, the question "What motivates you to make local friends?" was used to explore the mainland student's expectations of intercultural friendship. However, one of the pilot interviewees suggested that his mainland-HK friendship was not an intended outcome. He had not taken the initiative to approach local students at the beginning. Thus, the probe-questions "What does intercultural friendship mean to you?" and "If you didn't have local friends right now, how that would affect you?" were prepared to help interviewees share their thoughts and experience during the friendship formation.

The pilot feedback also helped to modify the survey design. For example, the question "What type of social-networking site have you used in your intercultural friendship" was used to explore the student's choice of OSN. After the pilot, an option (None or non-applicable) were added because one student reported that she never used OSN.

Questionnaire survey. In the survey, three types of data were obtained for the descriptive analysis. First, demographic data (i.e., gender, place of origin, mother-tongue, age, level of study and subject discipline). Second, quantitative data about self-evaluated language proficiency and L2 WTC were collected using an adapted survey from Ying and Liese's (1991) and MacIntyre's (2007) study. The self-evaluated language proficiency survey was proposed by Ying and Liese (1991) consisting of four items on a self-rating scale (speaking, listening, writing and reading). This instrument has proved reliable in measuring L2 proficiency of mainland Chinese in the overseas context (Yu & Downing, 2012).

The L2 WTC of students was investigated using the revised version of MacIntyre's "Willingness to Communicate Outside the Classroom Scale," which has been proven effective in examining WTC and Cross-cultural Adaptation of overseas Chinese (Gallagher, 2012). It consists of 12 items on a five-point Likert-scale (from 1 = almost never to 5 = almost always). In the field of L2 learning, it is generally agreed MacIntyre's scale to be the most popular WTC scale which focuses on situations in which individuals have the most voluntary choice about their L2 usage in general social situations (6 items) and task-like situations (6 items), which seldom occur in classrooms (MacIntyre et al, 2001). Higher mean scores in each dimension represent a higher willingness to communicate using a particular L2 during social interactions. In the past, both dimensions were tested for high reliability (Cronbach's alpha from 0.89 to 0.96) (Lu & Hsu, 2008; MacIntyre, 2007).

Third, addressing the needs of different sub-themes, the survey also includes questions about self-reported data about mainland-HK friendships (i.e., perceived challenges of friendship formation, perceived influential factors that contribute to their mainland-HK friendships). The survey design adopted the self-report strategy in Chen's study (2016), which has proved useful as a method for exploring an individual's perception of intercultural friendship experience. There is no limitation on the proposed number of perceived influential factors, but making

reference to Chen's similar study, the expected number lies between three and six (Chen, 2016). It has been reported that the open-questions in the self-report survey can create more in-depth responses and free the respondent from the limitation of categories (Jupp, 2006), and the qualitative answers from participants would lead the interview direction during the next phase, which prevents unintended interventions based on personal values or subjective understandings of researchers (Miller & Glassner, 2004).

The self-reported data also provided dependent variables in order to explore differences between cluster groups, such as whether the student has intercultural experience (i.e., study abroad, exchange programmes, overseas expeditions etc.) and whether they want to stay after graduation. Moreover, to identify which stage the student's friendship is currently in, all students were asked to recall memories of their best intercultural friend, and select which statement among friendship descriptions (adopted from Knapp's Relational Stage Model), supplemented by the affective, behavioural and cognitive dimensions proposed in Avtgis and West's study (1998).

In friendship studies, Knapp's Relational Stage Model is one of the most widely adopted models for identifying different friendship stages, while a clear operational definition was considered to be effective for distinguishing each stage (Chen, 2016; Peng, 2011). Knapp's model classified friendship into four stages (initiating stage, experimenting stage, intensify stage and integrating stage), which is further introduced in section 1.6.1.

Qualitative interview. After identifying the general trend of distribution, the students at each friendship stage would be selected randomly and be invited to attend a semi-structured interview. The interview aimed to refine, extend or explain the general picture via individual-case and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002), while the semi-structured setting allowed both the researcher and the participant to focus on the targeted

issue and freely express their attitudes, thoughts and experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Josselson, 2007; Kendall, 2008).

The interview adopted a grounded approach to capture the richness of the friendship development and explain students' thoughts by focusing on how they convey meaning through social experience, while perceiving the impact of the external context. The interview consisted of four sections:

Section A. Experience of friendship formation. Section A addressed the stage of intercultural friendship formation. The students were invited to ascribe how their mainland-HK friendship was established at the beginning, what perceived challenges they experienced and how they viewed the role of the environment or setting (the university or the lecture) in the friendship formation process. Some sample questions in section A included: "When and how did you meet him/her?" or "Since you met each other, what challenges have you experienced so far"? Students' responses in the quantitative phase were referred to in this section so that they could provide more explanation about their sharing in the self-reported survey.

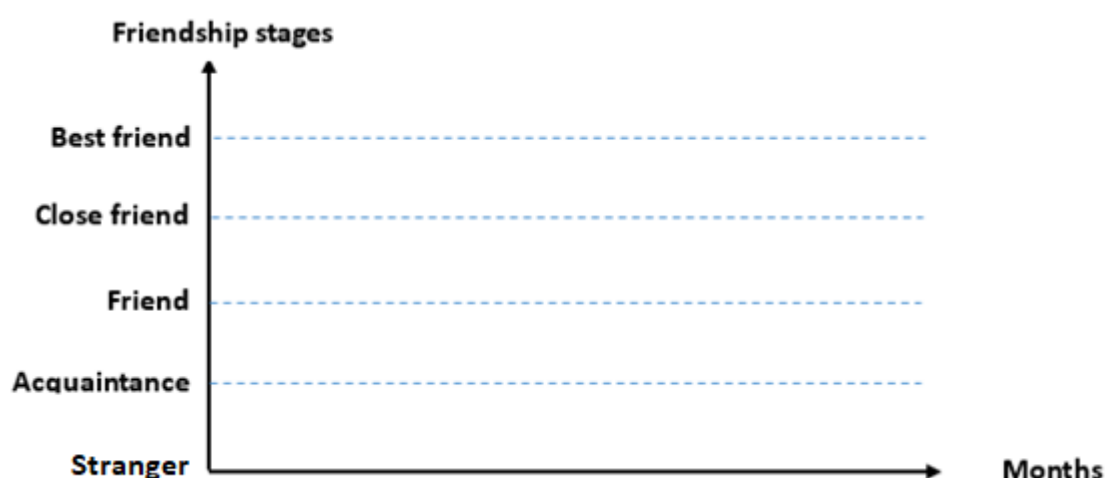
To facilitate the process, a probe sheet was prepared that helped students' memory recall upon request. The probe sheet was adopted and modified from the influential factor list of friendship, which is summarized in Chen's friendship study between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese (Chen, 2016). Some similar items in the original list, such as "Tolerance and open-mindedness" and "Accepting of differences" were integrated, while some inappropriate items for the Hong Kong context were deleted, such as "Avoid speaking Fukien during communication." Among all interviews, only two students read the probe-sheet before sharing their experience.

Section B. Experience of friendship development. Similar to section A, section B also aimed to map and compare the actual experience with the internally perceived experience. In the

beginning, the students were asked to define the word “friend” and express what “mainland-HK friendship” means to them. Then, the student would be asked to recall memories about the friendship development, while the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT) would be used during the process. First, the participant was invited to identify the times at which their friendship changed by plotting these points on the graph template (see below), whose X-axis indicates time (the time from knowing each other to the time of the interview) and whose Y-axis refers to the student’s friendship stages at this moment (identified by the self-reported survey). Time 0 represents the moment they met each other, while the acquaintance level would be marked on the Y-axis.

Figure 2

Template of friendship development diagram using RIT



After each point was plotted, the interviewee was asked (i) to map the most important factors (as suggested in the self-report survey) when progressing to different friendship stages; (ii) explain the reason for their choice; (iii) share what particular events were associated with this change, and how the quality and quantity of intercultural communication changed; and (iv) how they predict the future development trend of this friendship.

Previously, RIT has been shown to be an effective technique to examine the boosting and turning point of friendship development (Gareis, 2012; Sias et al, 2008). It originates from the clicking theory of Berg and Clark (1986), which suggests that friendship development often involves some impressive moments that indicate a “new friendship stage” and results in an acceleration of intimacy-linked behaviour, such as having greater breadth and depth of self-disclosure and spending more time in social activities together (Derlega et al, 2008).

Section C. Self-disclosure and online-communication. Section C aimed to examine how students communicate with each other at the individual level. The students were first invited (i) to share the most impressive experience of conversation; (ii) how students choose (or avoid) conversation topics during social interaction; (iii) why students are willing to communicate with others; and (iv) how they view the role of IMP/SNS in the mainland-HK friendship development. Responses were cross-checked with the survey data which offered empirical data for revealing how students fine-tuned their communication topics during real social interaction, and how their online communication behaviour developed.

Section D. Summarizing question. This section wrapped up and summarized each student’s experience of their mainland-HK friendship by giving advice to another novice student. They were also invited to compare their experience with other intercultural friendships they had had with non-locals (if any) in order to sharpen their arguments.

1.5.4 Interview setting and transcription

All interviews were conducted in a one-to-one setting so that the participant had privacy to express themselves without any third party interference (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes on average and all interviews were recorded so that the researcher could focus on the interview and raise any follow-up questions immediately without taking lengthy notes.

The interviews were conducted in Putonghua or Cantonese, according to the mother-tongue of the interviewees. After the interview, the content in the recordings were summarized first. All valuable content and themes were transcribed and translated by myself. Finally, each participant was asked to comment on his/her transcriptions afterwards to ensure the data validity.

Moreover, to minimize the discrepancy between the original text-source and translated transcript, all quotes in articles were back-translated into Chinese by another bilingual student to ensure that there was no drift in meaning. On the other hand, to protect the privacy of the third party, this study would blacken all real names or texts that may reveal anyone's identity during the analysis.

1.5.5 Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis. All survey data was first checked to filter out missing data, and then merged to one SPSS file for the statistical analysis as follows:

First, the demographic and self-reported data were processed using descriptive statistics. The dataset from Hong Kong and mainland students were compared using percentages. In Chapter 3, for example, there were 22 mainland students in the experimenting stage (acquaintance-to-friend), while 17 responses about “language difference” were received, then the percentage-count of “language difference” at this stage was calculated at 77.3% (17 divided by 22). The reported percentage of each item was calculated separately in mainland and local groups and given an average percentage at each stage. The items reported in the first three highest percentages at each stage were extracted to plot the graph in article 2 and 3 to see if any pattern could be discerned.

Second, Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the internal consistency of the instrument scales: (i) Scale of Perceived Language Proficiency and (ii) Scale of L2 WTC. The Cronbach's

alpha coefficients, means, and standard deviations of scales testing major variables are shown below:

Table 3

Internal reliability, means and standard deviations and range of the measures in Willingness to Communicate Outside the Classroom Scale

Measure	Number of items	Alpha coefficients
WTC in task-like situations	6	0.881
WTC in general situation	6	0.920

Table 4

Internal reliability, means and standard deviations and range of the measures in self-evaluated language proficiency scale

Measure	Number of items	Alpha coefficients
Cantonese proficiency	4	0.889
Putonghua proficiency	4	0.884
English proficiency	4	0.720

Since the alpha coefficients of all dimensions were above 0.70, they are considered as sufficient for group research (Nunnally, 1978).

Third, the independent sample T-Test was used to compare the means of independent groups (i.e., gender, plan after graduate, using/not using IMP/OSN of local peers (or mainland peers) to see whether there was statistical evidence that the associated population means with friendship-outcome variables were significantly different; (iv) The bivariate correlation test was used to examine the relationships between students' demographic variables, language-proficiency, L2 WTC and friendship-outcome variables.

Qualitative data analysis. Constant-comparison approach. Constant-comparison approach was used to manage the interview data and the self-reported data (proposed challenges and influential factors) in the survey. In the constant-comparison approach, the data collection and analysis are not processed in an independent phase, but a continuous cycle (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The new data was continuously compared with the initial categories, and a new category would be created if the new data could not be embedded in any group.

Previously, this approach was widely adopted in different social studies about the interviewees' subjective experience within a particular context (Creswell, 2009). It has been adopted in this study for three reasons. First, it allows the researcher to build up common patterns or themes from blurred idea and details (Thorne, 1997); Second, it links to evidence and proposed theory together and lets them support or shape each other. It ensures that the finding can better reflect the real situation and no data would be twisted towards a certain theme (Elliott & Lazenbatt, 2005); Third, it can reveal hidden thoughts from participants that may bring out unintended themes or topics for further discussion (Bevir & Kedar, 2008).

In this study, the constant-comparison approach underwent three-level coding (open, axial and selective coding) while a well-known software, NVIVO, was used to develop the coding system from line-by-line text to sub-themes from the most descriptive to the most interpretative levels (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each code was given two labels: (i) descriptive (how events are felt and experienced, and the relevant values and opinions attached); (ii) Argumentation: reflections in term of general theories and concepts about the events (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000).

Qualitative data analysis. Open, axial and selective coding. Open coding aims to uncover all concepts, where the data from both phases was read and re-read so that I could get familiar with the details (McCracken, 1988), which in the case of the present study was related to perceived challenges, friendship formation development and the individual response to challenges. The

interview transcript was split and given a preliminary indexical code label based on its background (who did what, when and where) and the research questions they were addressing.

Axial coding aims to generate tentative statements of relationships between phenomena, by relating categories with subcategories (Daengbuppha, Hemmington, & Wilkes, 2006). Data reduction was achieved at this stage. All data was reviewed to see whether they shared enough similarities to be grouped into a category. The coding paradigm between clustered categories could be related to the context, condition, individual actions, interactions strategies or consequence (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, the sharing of “the value-conflict about the time-schedule” and “priority for academic excellence and work-life balance” was grouped under the same category “task-oriented (cultural difference).” Interview responses, such as “the embarrassing experience of using Cantonese” and “the conflict of language choice during the group discussion” was grouped under the category “barrier (language difference)”.

The newly proposed factors were continuously compared with the current ones until each of them was sorted into only one category (see Braun et al, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At this point, the researcher should define what content each theme consists of, and explain the subtitles that give audiences a full sense of the theme and its importance.

Selective coding aims to describe the findings and provide answers to the RQs by selecting the core (or main) categories and relating them to other categories. The interrelationships among different categories creates a storyline that describes what happens, together with unfolding the reasoning behind the changes. For example, addressing the RQ in Article 2, “What are the perceived challenges of intercultural friendship formation between mainland and Hong Kong students?”, the axial code “task-oriented mindset (cultural difference)” and “barrier (language difference)” provided an empirical explanation for the statistical distribution of the self-perceived challenges of the intercultural formation in the quantitative survey.

Overall, the study involved a continuous validation of the relationships. The boundaries of each code further refined the coding categories during the data collection process.

1.6 The overall framework

Before conducting this study, it is necessary to select suitable frameworks for examining multi-level factors that influence intercultural friendship development at different stages. Accordingly, Knapp's Relational Stage Model and Social-Ecological Model were adopted to provide a systematic analysis in different articles.

1.6.1 Knapp's Relational Stage Model

In the past, different models were proposed to address the individual concerns at different friendship stages. In early age, Duck (1975) proposed the phase model of friendship, which described the friendship development process in three stages: (i) systematic gathering of information about partners; (ii) reconstruction of a partner's likely personality; and (iii) assessment of the degree of the possible support from partners, based upon similarities between them. Duck's model emphasized the cognitive dimensions of friendship and described what happened in each stage, whereas he did not clearly explain the connection among three stages. Later, Cupach & Imahori (1993) integrated the concept of cultural identity and proposed another three-stage model for examining the development process of intercultural friendship, including (i) trial; (ii) enmeshment; and (iii) renegotiation. Cupach's model focused on the conflicting norms or rules between different cultures, while the key to build intercultural friendship is to establish a "mutually acceptable relational identity by which their relationship can grow and evolve" (Lee, 2008, p.200).

The previous models offered a valuable reference for this study, yet they still have their weakness. For example, Duck's phase model could not clearly distinguish which stages the friendship belongs to. This stems from the fact that the "data collection" and "assessment of others' similarities" may happen at the same time. Cupach's model focused on the identity conflict,

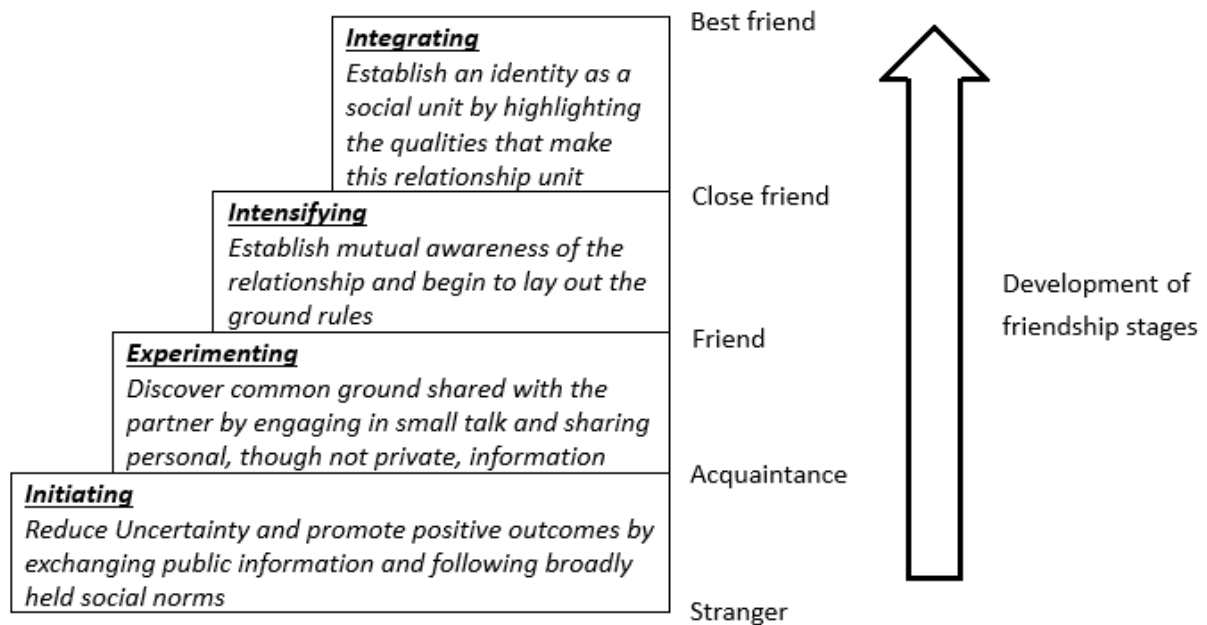
which would only be realized when the people already have frequent interaction or sharing with each other. It does not pay much attention to the friendship formation: Why people make the decision about friendship formation at the beginning.

To examine intercultural friendship at different stages, this study adopted the Knapp's Relational Stage Model, which is one of the most widely used models for identifying different friendship stages (Chen, 2016; Peng, 2011). Knapp's model originated with Social Penetration Theory (SPT), which focuses on the degree of intimacy that guides topic discussions. SPT uses the "onion" metaphor to describe the disclosure public self (outside layer) and personal selves (core) at different relationship stages (Taylor & Altman, 1987). "Self-disclosure" is highlighted as an indicator of friendship stages in two dimensions: (i) Breadth of self-disclosure and (ii) Depth of self-disclosure (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009).

Knapp's model classified friendship into four stages (Initiating stage, experimenting stage, intensify stage and integrating stage) (Figure 3), which are well-defined by detailed descriptions in cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Avtgis et al., 1998; Webb & Thompson-Hayes, 2002).

Figure 3

Knapp's Relational Stage Model (Knapp et al, 2014, p.240)



The initiating stage incorporates all processes enacted when people come together with others, where people tend to scan others and evaluate others by their existing stereotypes or any prior knowledge of others' reputation. Communication at this stage is to present themselves as "pleasant, likeable, understanding and socially-adopted" (Knapp et al, 2014, p. 154).

The experimenting stage involves the exchange of demographic information and a wide range of topics for penetrating conversation. Not only can this reduce uncertainty about others, but it also serves as an audition for the further development of friendship (Knapp et al, 2014).

The intensifying stage involves active participation and greater awareness of friendship. Self-disclosure increases as new friends start to get a glimpse of some previously withheld secrets, fears, imperfections, or other topics which make the speaker vulnerable (Knapp et al, 2014).

At the integrating stage, two individual personalities almost seem to fuse or coalesce, while each new friend tries to develop their own self-symbols (i.e., attitudes, opinions or merged social-circle) and strengthen their communion (Knapp et al, 2014).

Knapp's model is adopted in this study with the following reasons:

First, Knapp and Vangelisti's model is the only model which provides the operational definition for different friendship levels with detailed description and measurable items in terms of conversation topic, feeling and communication behaviour (Avtgis et al, 1998; Knapp et al, 2014), while allowing the researcher to examine influential factors at different friendship stages.

Second, Knapp's model is clear and intuitive compelling, wherewith the movement across different stages explained in terms of social exchange and social penetration principles, where SET and SPT can offer guidelines for analyzing how participants start the initial contact by evaluating the substantial emotional cost and benefits in context. ICT and SIT can as well serve as a guideline for understanding how individuals perceive and respond to the linguistic or cultural differences, and this is of great use to explain the choice and adjustment of self-disclosure during the intercultural communication process.

To better address the research focus, however, Knapp's model has been slightly revised in this thesis as below:

First, the model has skipped the "bonding stage" at the highest level of original Knapp's model, where the romantic relationship is institutionalized and shown to the public formally, such as marriage or cohabitation (Knapp et al, 2014), which is not applicable to the discussion of friendship development.

Second, this study focused on the development of intercultural friendship, therefore Knapp's idea about friendship deterioration will not be explored in detail since most friendship

deterioration is not a rapid process. It, in most cases, fades away gradually. It is more about the absence of some facilitating factors (Gareis, 2012), which were already covered in this thesis. Moreover, the previous literature suggested that the main challenges as perceived by mainland students are the difficulty of friendship formation and further development. To sharpen the research focus, this thesis would, therefore, take a positive stance and focus on the development, which is expected to provide more meaningful implications for the mainland-HK relationship.

1.6.2 Previous studies and critique about the Knapp's relational model

In the past, Knapp's relational model is widely adopted in relationship studies about intercultural interactions. Traudt's study (2018) in the US, for example, adopted Knapp's model to examine how six females manage conflicts in the intercultural relationship that emerged from cultural differences and revealed their choice of constructive relationship strategies. It is also a popular framework in examining the development of host-guest friendship. Another case in point is that Ujitani (2006) examined how Japanese and Australian students gave subjective interpretations of the similar incidents in their living experience and provided insight into their socio-emotional challenges in the host-community. Ujitani's study revealed some specific factors that facilitated (or alternatively inhibited) social interactions, such as social drinking, sense of humour or perceived appropriateness of conversation topics. Schwartz (2009) also used Knapp's model to examine the development of Latino-US friendship in the US universities. His study revealed that some cultural variables, such as collectivism and the strength of ethnic identity would affect the breadth and depth of self-disclosure during the intercultural friendship development.

On the other hand, Knapp's model is often used in the studies of relationship development on the Internet, which particularly fit the scope of this thesis. For instance, Fox and his colleagues (2013) adopted Knapp's model to examine how the romantic relationship of 10 dyads develops

on Facebook. Fox's study showed how people focused on the uncertainty reduction at the beginning level, and their decision to changing "relationship status" is dependent on whether they were satisfied with the level of commitment. Brody and his colleagues (2016) also conducted the survey about the behaviours and relational quality of teenagers' friendship, which identified 10 relational behaviours (e.g. posting, private message or managing impressions through photos) that are responsible for the development or deterioration of friendship in the social networking site.

Although Knapp's model is widely adopted in intercultural studies in both physical and online contexts, there are some limitations of Knapp's model which are note-worthy:

First, the stages of Knapp's model are inherently rooted in verbal communication and the amount of "self-disclosure", which may overlook other influential intrinsic (e.g. openness to other cultures or L2 proficiency) or extrinsic factors (e.g. time schedule or school accommodation arrangement). Moreover, people from different cultures may have different ways of emotional or intimacy expression (Hofstede, 2001; Willkin and Gareis, 2006), while the depth and breadth of self-disclosure may be also dependent on the conversation context (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Thus, it is not enough to simply examine the level of self-disclosure, without considering the external environment and the larger socio-cultural contexts.

Second, Knapp did not explain much about the motivation of friendship advancement. He followed the idea of SPT, which suggested that social needs are the universal needs of human being. In SPT, such social needs are fulfilled by the individual self-disclosure, which is considered a form of emotional release and a way to enhance mutual understanding between each other (Knapp et al, 2014). However, it has less consideration about the crucial role of some unplanned life event (e.g. moving into the same hostel, working on the same project) which may boost (or reduce) the perceived level of friendship (Garies, 2011).

To summarize, Knapp's Relational Stage Model outlined the general pattern of intercultural friendship development and guide this study. Addressing the above concerns, this study would adopt another model: Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Model to explore the possible factors that are involved in the intricate friendship development in larger social contexts. Also, the students would be invited to share their motivation about the development of intercultural friendship, as well as how they give the emotional or intimacy expression to each other. They are then expected to share the crucial moment that indicates the shift of friendship stage with the use of Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT), which would be introduced in the later section.

1.6.3 Social ecological model

Knapp's model offered a structural framework for examining different friendship stages; however, there is still a need to categorize the multifaceted influential factors of friendship in a systematic way. For example, the Social-Penetration Theory (SPT) considered cultural-distance as the mediator between self-disclosure and friendship development (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009). The Intergroup-Contact Theory (ICT) addressed the trait-like personal attributes, such as social competence and open-mindedness, and examined how they were moderated in different social-contexts (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1998). It is generally agreed that contextual and personal factors are not mutually exclusive, but build on each other.

In the past, different models about the underlying factors of friendship was proposed, while they are largely dependent upon underlying academic theories or assumption. SET and ICT tend to examine the factors at the individual level, since addressed the trait-like personal attributes, such as social competence and open-mindedness, and examined how they were moderated in different social-contexts. For example, Campbell and his colleagues proposed the five-factor framework (Reciprocal candour, mutual interest, personableness, similarity, and physical attraction) on the basis of SES to explain the development of online friendship

(Campbell, Holderness and Riggs, 2015). On the other hand, Liu and his colleagues' study about the online friendship of 441 micro-blogging users identified different motivating (enjoyment and trust in service providers) and inhibiting factors (perceived anonymity of self and perceived risk) at the individual level (Liu, et al, 2016).

By contrast, SPT and SIT showed more emphasis on the sociocultural context, while their supporters tend to view friendship as the social and emotional development in a relational context, which highlighted the role of different contextual factors. For example, Kudo and his colleagues (2019) proposed the three-stage person-in-context framework, which focused on how contextual affordances and students' agency co-contribute to the development of three relational stages (i.e. interactivity, reciprocity and unity).

However, due to the complexity of human interaction, it is generally agreed that no single factor can fully explain the success or failure of the relationship development. The contextual and personal factors are not mutually exclusive but they build on each other.

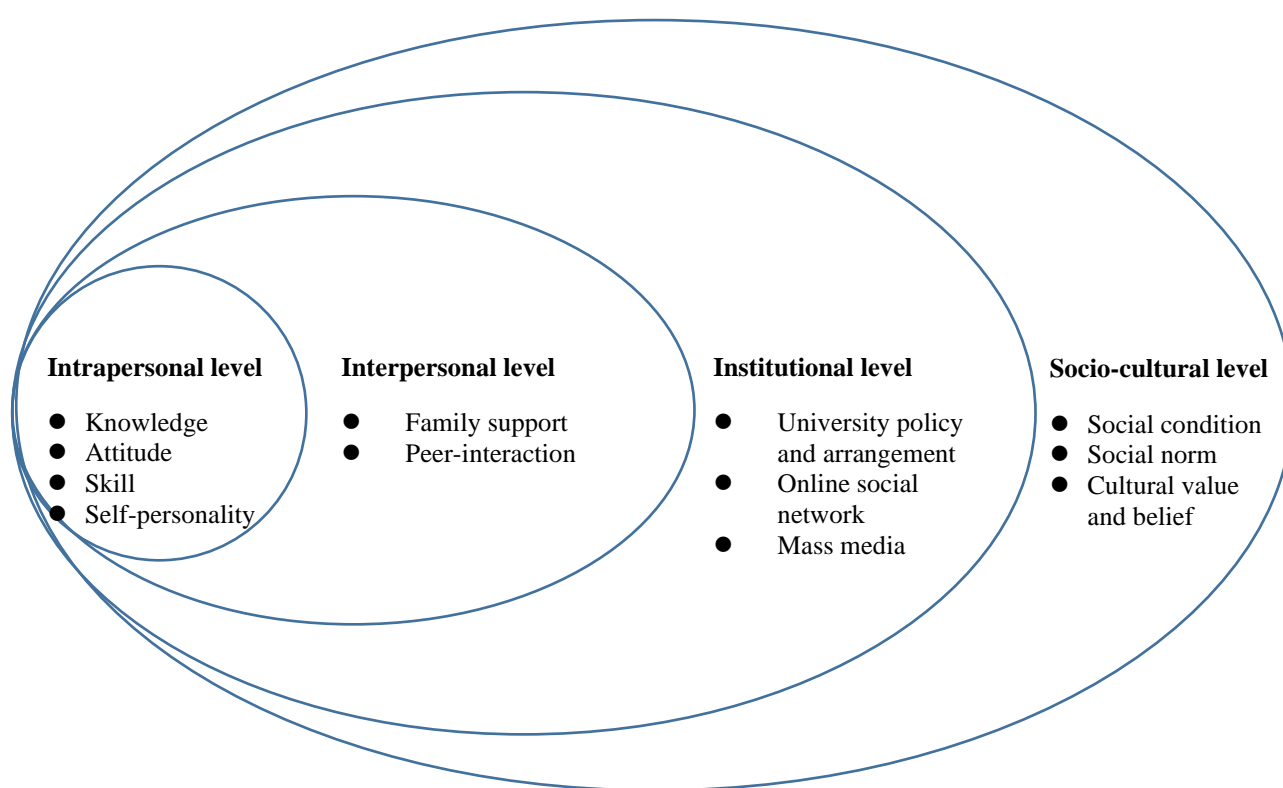
Addressing the above concerns, the present study also adopts Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Model (SEM), which helps to explore the complex interactions among different factors and how they affect individual behaviour in real practice.

SEM is a well-known theory-based framework for understanding the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that drive behaviour (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). It has been widely adopted in various friendship studies to examine the impact of different factors, such as the role of network and peer influences, family interaction (Swearer et al., 2012), conflict management (Oetzel & Rinderle, 2006), immigrants' acculturation experience (Kalengayi, Liberati, & Tetzlaff, 2012) and intercultural marriage (Seshadri and Knudson-Martin, 2012).

In this study, all factors were grouped in 4-level SEM, which includes: (i) intrapersonal (microsystem); (ii) interpersonal (mesosystem); (iii) institutional (exosystem); and (iv) socio-cultural (macrosystem) (Figure 4). The policy level (e.g., national, state, local laws) was explored in detail as it tends not to be related to intercultural friendship at the individual level.

Figure 4

Social-Ecological Framework underpinning factors influencing mainland-HK friendship



At the core of SEM is the intrapersonal level (microsystem), which also includes the person's natural genetic makeup. Factors include demographic variables (e.g., gender, age) personality, personal history and other individual dispositions that impact intercultural communication behaviour. Interactions between students and the multiple layers of contexts influence intercultural friendship development. For example, a study of ICT argued that individuals who lacked language skills had a fear of creating misunderstandings which often reduced the

non-native speakers' willingness to communicate with local peers, and discouraged them from pursuing, initiating or prolonging intercultural contacts (Clément et al., 2003).

The interpersonal level (mesosystem) concerns the environment with immediate influence on the level of self-disclosure about family and school. For example, previous intercultural studies often involved the discussion about how the peers (Lang, 2011) or the family (Clarke & Hammer, 1995) affect the individual's decision of developing intercultural social network.

At the interpersonal level, the present study also examined how two or more of the environments in the microsystem interact to affect friendship development. Addressing the recent social unrest in Hong Kong, for example, the non-local student may receive different opinions about controversial issues from family, school, local peers and co-national peers, and they may align themselves with their peer's view, rather than their parents' opinions. In other words, the student chooses which environment to value and where to place meaning.

The institutional level (exosystem) refers to the institutional settings that affect development, but are not as directly involved. In friendship studies, the institutional proximity includes organized events (e.g., parties and cultural tours), programmes (e.g., buddy systems), clubs, dormitories, joint assignments, group work or any other attempt by schools and teachers to facilitate intercultural relationship development (Kudo et al, 2019). In the past, the linkage between the university's efforts and individual friendship has attracted considerable attention. For example, the peer-mentoring programme has also been found to be helpful for students to feel more integrated and supported at universities (Yomtov, Plunkett, Efrat, & Marin, 2015), while extra-curricular activities are highlighted by Hendrickson (2018) as the key to building up intercultural friendship, especially for those who have off-campus accommodation and do not share the same university space.

The socio-cultural level (macrosystem), involves the culture that indirectly shapes the individual's mindset and communication behavior, including customs, attitudes, values, and worldview (Smith & Hamon, 2016). It also involves subjective norms, such as the individual's perceptions of social pressures to perform or not to perform particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Some studies in second language acquisition (SLA) hold a similar view. Clement (2003), for example, suggested coined the term “subjective L2 (Second Language) norm” as the external social pressure to use a second language. In previous friendship studies, it has been reported that students see the world through a cultural lens, including the values, and attitudes that permeate their everyday lives, and this cultural lens is the result of socialization in their various microsystems. For non-local students, they need to adapt as they are exposed to unfamiliar environments in the host-community and interpret subjective meanings from daily experiences. In intercultural studies, this is best represented by the perceived social identity and concept of friendship.

1.6.4 Revised SEM in this study

In this study, the focus of SEM is slightly revised to better fit the research context of mainland-HK friendship.

First, this thesis would mainly focus on the individual perception (intrapersonal level) and the context (institutional level, e.g. the school environment and the online social network), while the peer's and parental influence (interpersonal level) would not be explored in separate sections. It is because the topic “mainland-HK friendship” is characterized dominantly by personal interactions appears at the interface between affordances in interpersonal proximity in institutional settings, while it is generally agreed that the school and the Internet are the social environments for shaping the mode and frequency of student interaction directly (Chan & Cheng, 2004; Ward & Tracey, 2004). The studies thus focused on these two specific contexts with separated studies (Study 4 and 5), which allows the researcher to directly examine how

students interact with each other, such as how they select (or not select) the conversation topics, and how they manage the perceived cultural conflict, in the specific context. It is expected that this arrangement could help the researcher draw more useful implication for different stakeholders.

Moreover, previous psychological studies about adolescents suggested that the parental influence would be greatly reduced to non-significant level at the university level (Kahne et al, 2012; Olsen, 2004). Similarly, peer's influence would be reduced in the university context, due to the high flexibility of classroom-setting and individualized study schedule. Therefore, this thesis would not explore their influence in a separate chapter, but to include them in the studies at intrapersonal level, such as how parents and peers exert indirect influence on shaping their intergroup attitude or expectation about friendship (Reynolds, 2007) or their strength of social identity (Jo, 2004; Reynolds, 2007).

Second, this study would particularly highlight the perceived impact of macrosystem on individuals. Since the Umbrella Movement in 2014, there has been a growing tension between mainland and Hong Kong that has planted the seed of racism and anti-Mainland hostilities among local teenagers (Lowe & Tsang, 2018). The Anti-Mainland hostilities erupted again in the "Anti-Extradition Amendment Protest," where millions of Hong Kong people took part in mass protests against the controversial Hong Kong-China extradition bill bringing on escalating police violence. The protests also legitimized the highly visible racialization of mainlanders in Hong Kong as "locusts" who were singled out for discriminatory treatment.

1.6.5 Previous studies and critique about the Social-ecological model

In the past, SEM was widely adopted in different intercultural studies to examine the interpersonal interaction within a larger social context. For example, Cao and his colleagues (2018) integrated the multi-layered socio-ecological model to examine how Chinese

international students interact with multi-national students and domestic students in three Belgian universities. Cao's study identified different multi-dimensional inhibitors for intercultural interactions and how they perceived the impact of the surrounding cultural environment. Similarly, Feng (2018) adopted SEM to explore the forms of the intercultural clash as perceived by 74 Chinese immigrant youth in western Canada, where their experience of being marginalized in schools, hidden forms racism and family cultural influence (e.g. parental ideologies and the absence of role model) were revealed. On the other hand, SEM is also an effective tool to incorporate a specific framework and examine the specific subjective perception in the nested, interconnected system. For example, Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2012) also adopted SEM in their studies about interracial and intercultural couples. Their qualitative interview focused on the specific identity "we", and explore how 17 interracial and intercultural couples create meaning "we" at microsystem (the couple), mesosystem (the family: we and us), exosystem (the community: We and them), macrosystem (society: "we and the world"), and chronosystem (time: "we and life").

Although Bronfenbrenner's SEM is useful to explore intercultural experience in the multi-layered context, there are also some limitations which are note-worthy:

First, SEM could not give a clear insight into how much an effect has over another. The students' sharing at different SEM levels may report the accumulated effect of different factors together, while it is challenging for researchers to identify which factors are more/less important than others in such complex contexts.

Second, it is not easy for the researcher to draw practical implications from the findings directly. For example, it is almost impossible to ask participants for the change of the surrounding environment, the parental mindset or their individual lifestyles, if these components were found to be the barrier of friendship development. Thus, these factors make it

hard for the researcher to distinguish which aspect(s) should be the focus of future improvement initiatives.

Addressing the above concerns, this thesis adopted the participant-driven approach in the quantitative phase of study 2 and 3, where the importance of different influential factors was shown by the frequency distribution. In the qualitative interview, the students would then be asked to share how they convey meaning through interaction with others, and how they match their reported data in the survey to their experience sharing. Second, this thesis breaks the friendship development in five studies with a different focus (e.g. language proficiency and willingness to communicate in study 1, role of the university in study 4 and role of the OSN in study 5) so that that the researcher could give suggestions to different agencies separately and targeted draw implications from the findings.

1.7 Overview of the thesis

This cumulative thesis consists of seven chapters. In the first six chapters, the study answers the research questions posed above. In the final chapter, I summarize the main results and discuss their practical and theoretical implications.

Chapter 2: Overview of mainland-HK friendship

The article in chapter 2 addresses RQ1, which aims to present an overall picture about mainland-HK friendships by exploring the linkage between friendship outcomes, language-related backgrounds (e.g., language proficiency and L2 WTC) and demographic variables (gender, future plan after graduation and prior intercultural experiences) at the intrapersonal level. This part of the thesis adopted a mixed-method approach. The correlations between different variables were explored while the findings and analysis was further supplemented by qualitative data from the participants.

Chapter 3: How intercultural friendships form

Chapter 3, an extension of the previous chapter, addresses RQ2, which focuses on the perceived challenge of friendship formation at the beginning stage. In earlier local studies, the researchers tended to attribute the failure of building intercultural friendships to the locals' low willingness to communicate with outgroup members (Wong, 1997). However, more recent studies have suggested that it also depends on the non-local students' desire for social contact with the host-community, which is heavily reliant on individual attributes and one's socio-cultural background (e.g., different communication behaviour and expectations on friendship in individualist/collectivist cultures) (Chiu, 2014; Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

This part of the thesis adopted a mixed-designed approach, which explores students' perceived challenges in the friendship formation process. First, it explored the perceived challenges of mainland-HK friendship formation through the self-report survey. The reported data of mainland and Hong Kong groups is summarized in a table of descriptive statistics and a distribution chart for between-group comparison. The findings were triangulated by interviews, which investigated how certain challenges affected friendship establishment, and how they could be overcome. The interview also explored the students' subjective expectations about intercultural friendship, and how they affected their choice and communication behaviour with intercultural peers.

Chapter 4: How intercultural friendships develop

Chapter 4 addresses a similar, but different question: "Why the intercultural friendship with host nationals (or vice versa) cannot go even further?" Similar to the previous chapters, this part of the thesis adopted a mixed-method approach and explored the perceived influential factors in the development process of mainland-HK friendships. However, it introduced the concept of "friendship stages" by referring to Knapp's Relational Stage Model.

In contrast to most friendship studies that have neglected the difference between friendship stages, this study investigated which factor(s) were perceived as important in different friendship stages and how their influence varies over stages. Specifically, the interview examined how individuals interpret their subjective experience and peers' behaviour during interactions. Chapters 3 and 4 provide a further test of intercultural friendship development, where empirical data could be compared with other similar studies about overseas Chinese, such as Chen's study about mainland-Taiwanese friendship (Chen, 2016) and Japanese adaptation in Australian universities (Kudo & Smith, 2003).

Chapter 5: The role of university in mainland-HK friendship

In the last chapter, the students shared their interaction experience at the individual level; however, they may not have been consciously aware of how their interaction was shaped by the surrounding environment. Addressing the above gap, therefore, Chapter 5 and 6, focused on contextual factors of mainland-HK friendship at the institutional level: the role of the university setting and the intercultural interactions on online-social platforms.

The literature generally shows that the university setting is a crucial factor in intercultural communication and non-local student's adaptation in the host-community. On the one hand, the academic system, such as the mode of teaching, the classroom arrangement or curriculum design, determines the opportunity and the depth of intercultural interactions. On the other hand, the school has the authority to allocate resources to student support and coordinate all student activities (Saito & Saito, 2016). However, some recent studies have shifted their focus to student-led activities suggesting that it is more effective than school-led initiatives in terms of establishing close relationships between intergroup members (Hendrickson, 2018).

To examine how intercultural interactions are shaped and supported by the university, this chapter aims to explore students' views on their current university support and what

expectations they hold. To offer a more comprehensive ground for discussion, the project manager of Student Affairs Office (SAO) was invited to share the official view on students' support including limitations.

Chapter 6: The role of online social-networks in mainland-HK friendship

Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on the institutional level of mainland-HK friendship development, in order to test previous friendship theories in the new digital context of online social-networks (OSN).

Since most friendship theories were proposed before 2000, the role of OSN is seldom considered. However, it is undeniable that OSN has offered a new mode of interpersonal communication and gained immense popularity for encouraging interpersonal relationships worldwide (Chan & Cheng, 2004; Ward & Tracey, 2004). The objective of this part of the thesis, therefore, is twofold. First, it aims to investigate whether and how OSN affects the development of intercultural friendships, while testing the validity of established theories. Second, this study explores the role of two main forms of OSN (instant-messaging platforms and social-networking sites) regarding intercultural interactions. The students' perceived impact was compared between students in different friendship stages. In combination with the results of Chapter 5, the thesis offers a more comprehensive picture of how contextual factors affect mainland-HK friendships and shape their communication behaviour at the institutional level.

Chapter 2: Overview of the mainland-HK friendship in Hong Kong

This chapter article was published as a journal article, entitled “Making intercultural friends: How social and individual factors affect the mainland-Hong Kong friendship network” in the Hong Kong Teachers' Centre Journal in December, 2019.

Article 1: Making intercultural friends: How social and individual factors affect the mainland-Hong Kong friendship network

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a rapid growth of mainland students in higher education institutions in Hong Kong. However, it is frequently reported that mainland students have difficulties in developing friendship with local peers. To facilitate the mainland-HK integration, this study examines the relationship that mediates social and individual factors and mainland-HK friendship. One hundred and fifty-nine students completed an online survey, which was followed by semi-structured interviews. Results showed that mainland students rated their intercultural friendship higher in terms of quality and the number of friends, and that willingness to communicate (WTC) in second language (L2) was correlated with the satisfaction in friendship between the two groups; Second, perceived language proficiency was found to be correlated with L2 WTC, although it is not totally correlated with the level of friendship; Third, the prior intercultural experience was found to be correlated with L2 WTC

and the number of mainland friends among local students. The finding also sheds light on implications to university support and future research.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the internationalization of higher education section has become a major trend worldwide. According to the statistic of The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), over 4.5 million students are enrolled in university-level education outside their home country (OECD, 2014). As part of the trend, there is increasing attention on recruiting overseas students globally and in Hong Kong. According to official statistics, the number of non-local students enrolled in UGC-funded programmes in 2015/16 in Hong Kong increased by 115% since 2010/11 from 8,392 to 18,060 in 2018/19, where 68.2% of them (or 12,322 students) are from mainland China (University Grants Committee, 2019). Undoubtedly, mainland student has already become a significant and indispensable population group on the university campus.

Regarding the student's integration, previous local studies reported that a considerable number of mainland students expected and desired friendship with local peers during their course of study (Chiu, 2014). However, the formation of local friendship remains challenging due to lack of opportunities to interact with Hong Kong students (Yu & Zhang, 2016). Instead, the mainland students tended to seek social support from other co-national or international friends instead (van de Vijver, Helms-Lorenz, & Feltzer, 1999; Lin, Kim, & LaRose, 2012). Even some mainland students have local friends, their friendship is often shallow, short-term and task-oriented (Chiu, 2014; Lu & Hsu, 2008; Yu & Wright, 2016).

Building intercultural friendship with host-nationals is however important for non-local students. Benefits could include better sociocultural adaptation (Berry, 2005; Ward & Masgoret, 2006; Yu & Zhang, 2016); a stronger sense of belonging to the host community

(Klomegah, 2006); more opportunities to learn about worldview and values in other cultures (Li, 2006) and greater chances of social-emotional needs being fulfilled (MacIntyre, 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ying & Liese, 1991). At the societal level, intercultural friendship could be valuable because closer intercultural relationships would likely increase the possibility of non-local graduates' willingness to stay and contribution to the host community. Even if they return home, they may be able to fill positions of influence and become more apathetic with their host society. As a result of these above benefits, better integration of non-local students (including their friendship with host nationals) has become a priority worldwide (Ward & Masgoret, 2006).

With respect to the formation of intercultural friendship formation, existing literature suggests that there are some common contributing factors, such as language proficiency, a desire to stay behind after graduation, prior experience and frequency of contact, and L2 WTC (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Ward & Kennedy, 1996). The influence of these factors on friendship is however highly elastic, as one's expectation for friendship can easily vary over time in response to individual and relational situations. The correlation among different variables and satisfaction levels has to be studied in depth. Further exploration is needed for instance about whether factors such as host language proficiency are the causes or effects of intercultural friendship (Ma, Wong, & Lam, 2014; Zeng, 2006). To sharpen the research focus, the intercultural friendship in this study would be limited to the friendship between mainland and Hong Kong students, who have grown up and received at least 6-year secondary education in mainland and Hong Kong separately.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Impact of L2 WTC on intercultural friendship

Although there are clear cultural differences between East and West, the friendship in different cultures often shares similar sets of value traits, such as emotional support or trustworthiness (Gareis, 2000). However, these traits and their importance often expressed differently across cultures. They often show different correlations with the communication-based variables. willingness to communicate (WTC), for example, is frequently reported by intercultural friendship studies (Gareis et al., 2011).

The concept of WTC originated in the field of second language (L2) acquisition, which is defined as “the intention to initiate communication, given a choice” (MacIntyre, 2007, p.369). It is often involved in the discussion of friendship formation, since friendship typically starts with good communication, and develops according to individuals' willingness to engage with others. Previously, the relationship between WTC and intercultural friendship has been confirmed in different studies. For example, Barraclough and his colleagues found that WTC was directly proportional to the depth of relationship (at the level of a stranger, acquaintance or friend for instance). It is also found to be positively related to the frequency, breadth and depth of communication (Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988). Barraclough also suggested that WTC at different friendship levels could vary significantly across student group, which is yet to be explored.

2.2 WTC and the frequency of intercultural communication

Communication serves as a process of psychological preparation and reduces the anxiety and uncertainties for the development of friendship. For example, Park and his colleagues' study (2009) about the use of the Internet revealed that, higher levels of WTC could lead to more frequent intercultural interactions, no matter in the physical or the digital environment. This finding was consistent with Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT), which proposed that a higher frequency of intercultural communication could increase mutual understanding and diminish prejudice and bias (Allport, 1954; Binder et al., 2009). In their views, intercultural

communication is a data collection process which can help individuals better understand others (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). It also linked with the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, which suggests that people always need information to reduce their senses of uncertainty in predicting how others would behave (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; West & Turner, 2010).

2.3 WTC and the quality of intercultural communication

In previous studies, WTC is frequently considered as a strong predictor of the quality of intercultural communication. For example, Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Bielak (2015) found that the breadth of conversation was positively correlated with the level of WTC. In Hong Kong, Gao (2010) also reported that a wider range of dimensions of self-disclosure was associated with a higher level of WTC.

The linkage between WTC and intercultural communication is often explained by Tajfel's social identification theory (1981), which suggested that the development of intercultural friendship is a process of forging a new integrated identity in a multicultural context, and that social identification is a cognitive process in which people categorise and culturally relate themselves with others not in their own group. Individuals with a strong sense of home-cultural identity often tend to initiate relationships with those with a similar background in values, attitudes, beliefs, age, ethnicity or religion, according to what is known as the principle of homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, Cook, 2001).

In this regards, WTC is a useful predictor of the frequency and quality of intercultural communication, while it depends on the perceived cultural similarity with others. Whether WTC and host-language proficiency are the causes or effects of intercultural friendship is an issue which needs further investigation.

2.4 Linkage between WTC, language proficiency and other demographic variables

In previous literatures, the role of WTC in the development of intercultural friendship, its nature and its linkage with other variables were discussed in different directions.

First, in the field of social-psychology, WTC was considered as a personality-based, trait-like attribute which remains constant in different communication contexts (Pawlak et al., 2015), while the researchers in this direction tend to focus on how individual WTC forms. Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre (2003), for example proposed a framework of WTC formation, which linked with linguistic proficiency, confidence as well as perceived ethnic identity. The discussion about WTC formation is further enriched by different studies. In Chinese context, for example, the importance of language competence and linguistic confidence have also been reconfirmed in a large number of studies (Yu, 2010). Ulu's study about the international posture of 167 Chinese college students also reported that individuals with stronger interest in international affairs and making friends with foreigners were more likely to initiate intercultural communication (Ulu, Fan, & Yu, 2015). In addition, demographic background factors, such as age, gender and level of study, were also found to be correlated with the level of WTC (MacIntyre, 2007). However, no matter how it has developed, WTC is still considered as an individual attribute which is context-independent.

On the other hand, some researchers took a more comprehensive view of WTC and considered WTC as a context-dependent variable. For example, MacIntyre et al. (1998) are in favour of a pyramid model for WTC whereby it is considered as a behavioural intention that is dependent on the variables at the bottom layers, such as situated antecedents (state and specific partner of communication), motivational propensities (self-confidence, interpersonal and inter-group motivation) and affective-cognitive context (inter-group attitudes, social situation and language competence). Echoing MacIntyre et al's work, Lu and Hsu's study (2008) of Chinese students in United States found that both the "immersion time" and "language competence" could affect the level of WTC among students of different racial backgrounds. They also noted

that students living abroad often reported higher levels of WTC than students from host countries. Similar findings have also been reported by researchers in Europe (Arends-Tóth & Van De Vijver, 2003), Australia (Barracough et al., 1988), Japan (Yashima, 2002; Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2016) and China (Errington, 2009), suggesting that students would express different levels of WTC in different contexts.

In Hong Kong, however, the formation of WTC between mainland and local students has not been fully explored. In contrast to the US or other western countries, Hong Kong is a region where the majority of population does not have overriding political rights, economic power or higher cultural prestige over its overseas students (from the mainland in this case). The invulnerable self-perception of mainland students may make the WTC between them and local students a more complicated issue for investigation.

So far, there is little consensus about the role of WTC in the development of friendship. On one hand, friendship and local social support are considered as useful predictors of WTC (Ulu et al., 2015; Yashima, 2002). On the other hand, some researchers suggest that intercultural friendship is an accumulated outcome of WTC and other influential factors like linguistic proficiency or communication anxiety (Gareis et al., 2011; Lu & Hsu, 2008; Yashima et al., 2016). Whether WTC and host-language proficiency are the causes or effects of intercultural friendship is an issue, which needs further investigation.

Addressing the above concerns, this study aims to investigate the links between the development of the WTC and intercultural friendship in the Hong Kong context. The correlations among WTC, language proficiency and the extent they would influence the development of friendship were examined. Addressing the above concerns, the following research questions were proposed to guide this study:

1. Is there any difference in the satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship

between mainland and local students?

2. What is the relationship between L2 WTC with the satisfaction level and depth of friendship between the two groups?

3. What is the relationship between the perceived language proficiency in the interlocutor's language with the satisfaction level and depth of mainland-HK friendship?

4. How would demographic factors (gender, future plan after graduate and prior intercultural experience) affect WTC, satisfaction level and depth of mainland-HK friendship?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A mixed-method design was used to collect data and information for the purpose of having a deeper understanding of the research problem and questions (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2003).

The study began by inviting students to complete an online questionnaire (see Section 9.3) about their current friendship status, WTC and self-perceived language proficiency. Demographic information including age, gender, prior intercultural experience, and desire of whether to stay after graduation (for mainland students only) was also collected. After this survey, 24 questionnaire respondents were randomly selected and invited to participate in a 40-minute semi-structured interview (see Section 9.4). Students were asked to recall their experiences of friendship with local students and share their views about how L2 WTC would facilitate its development. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese or Putonghua according to the native language of participants and were audio-recorded with their consent.

3.2 Sampling

One hundred and fifty-nine undergraduate and postgraduate students who were having some forms of intercultural relationship (at the acquaintance level or above) were recruited from a Hong Kong university. With a mean age of 21.6 years ($SD = 3.12$, range from 18 to 35), the sampling included both the mainland students ($n = 53$, 33.1%) and local students ($n = 106$, 66.7%), and consisted of 16.7% male ($N = 26$) and 81.3% female ($N = 130$). The proportions of these students in terms of cultural origins and gender were similar to the respective ratios of students as a whole in the university.

3.3 Data Collection and instrument

The questionnaire was concerned with the number of intercultural friends students had, how far they were satisfied with this number and the overall quality and depth of relationship. In the first three items, students were asked about their satisfaction of mainland-HK friendship on a 5-point Likert scale. Also, they were asked to recall about their best intercultural friends and selected the statement which best described the links between them and their intercultural friends. Their responses were analysed according to the Relational Stage Model of Knapp, Vangelisti and Caughlin (2014) which was one of the most widely adopted models in the literature (Chen, 2016; Peng, 2011). Under this model, friendship is classified into four levels; each of which has its specific cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Avtgis et al, 1998; Webb & Thompson-Hayes, 2002) (Table 1).

Table 1

Cognitive, affective and behaviour components at different friendship levels (adapted from Knapp, Vangelisti & Caughlin, 2014, p.46)

Cognitive, affective and behavioural components at each stage of development of friendship between students from two cultural groups	
Initiating stage	<p>Students from one group often feel hesitant and nervous when meeting peers from the other group. They try to present themselves as pleasant, likable, understanding and socially adept persons, and carefully observing the others to reduce any uncertainty about personal mood, interest, orientations and personality.</p> <p>Most of the conversations are about general information exchange (e.g. name, hometown or majoring subject) and superficial topics, such as weather, environment, entertainment, travel or other means of recreation.</p>
Experimenting stage	<p>Students from one group feel uncertain but curious about students from the other group. They often spend time on searching for commonalities in habits, family conditions, hobbies, interests and life experiences.</p>
Intensifying stage	<p>They feel closer when meeting the others. The amount of self-disclosure increases, covering aspects such as previously withheld secrets, fears, frustrations, failures, imperfections, prejudices or individual moral values. Relationships however can be at risk if there are sharp differences in personal views.</p>
Integrating stage	<p>Students from both groups feel all at ease when each other, and begin to integrate among themselves. Their attitudes, opinions, interests and tastes now clearly distinguish them from the others. They begin to share routines, identity and jargon that are unique only among themselves. Conversations may involve some sensitive issues (such as political propensity) as well as reflections about common experience. Personal secrets, sex matters and future plans may also be discussed.</p>

In this study, L2 WTC (Putonghua for Hong Kong students, and Cantonese for mainland students) would be explored with the revised version of MacIntyre's "Willingness to Communicate Outside the Classroom Scale," which has been proven effective in examining WTC and Cross-cultural Adaptation of overseas Chinese (Gallagher, 2012). It includes 12 items about WTC in task-like situations and general social situations.

MacIntyre's WTC scale is adopted in this study for two reasons. First, it is widely used across different intercultural friendship studies with high reliability in all language skills (from .89 to .96) (Lu & Hsu, 2008; MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre et al., 2001). Second, it is generally agreed to be the most popular WTC scale. It focuses on situations in which participants have the most volitional control over their L2 usage during social interaction, which is often diminished in classroom settings (MacIntyre, 2007). Meanwhile, self-evaluated language proficiency was measured with a 4-item self-rating scale for L2 proficiency (in speaking, listening, writing and reading), which was designed by Ying and Liese (1991) and adopted by Yu and Shen (2012) in linguistic and adaptation studies in Hong Kong.

Students' satisfaction with intercultural friendship would vary according to the levels of WTC, language proficiency and different demographic factors. Given this understanding, this study used a between-group design to compare the WTC and language proficiency level between the two groups of students concerned. Descriptive statistics were obtained for each scale and the sub-scale scores on all measures. Data were screened for outliers and analysed with an independent t-test to compare the two groups on selected continuous variables including satisfaction with the quality of friendship and the number of cross-border friends. For mainland students, independent t-tests were particularly useful to examine if some demographic variables, such as gender, desire of whether to stay after graduation and prior intercultural experience, would affect their current feelings about making friends with local people. Additional analyses included bivariate correlations among Likert-type ratings of WTC, language proficiency and satisfaction levels of friendship. Results from the semi-structured interviews were used to augment and further explain the findings obtained from the questionnaire survey.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Research question 1

Participants were asked to express their satisfaction levels about the number of intercultural friends and the quality and quantity of mainland-HK friendship. The results are shown in the below table:

Table 2

Level of satisfaction with friendship quality, quantity and number of intercultural friends

	Satisfaction level about the number of mainland-HK friends	Satisfaction level about the quality of mainland-HK friendship	Number of intercultural friends	Level of friendship
Mainland students (N=53)	3.69	3.46	5.96	2.26
Hong Kong students (N=106)	3.58	3.64	4.19	2.10

Table 2 shows that mainland students had a larger mean number of intercultural friends (5.96) than Hong Kong students (4.19). They also had a slightly higher satisfaction level with the friendship quantity (3.69 vs. 3.58). In contrast, Hong Kong students reported a higher satisfaction level (3.64 vs. 3.46) with the quality of mainland-HK friendship.

T-tests were also performed to determine whether the two groups of students did show differences across the four variables. Yet, no statistically significant differences were found except with respect to the number of intercultural friends. The number of local friends (N=5.96) reported by mainland students was significantly more than that reported by Hong

Kong students ($N = 4.19$), $t(137) = 2.23$, $p < 0.05$. This finding indicates that mainland students did have a wider network of intercultural friends than local students.

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that mainland students were less satisfied with the number of intercultural friends that they had made, although their reported number was more than that of their local counterparts. The trend that they were more willing to make local friends could be due to their needs for reducing acculturation stress and adjusting to the local socio-cultural environment more successfully (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Research question 2

Research question 2 examined the relationship between WTC and the friendship outcomes (satisfaction with friendship quality, quantity, number of intercultural friends and depth of friendship). The results are outlined below:

Table 3

Correlations between WTC and friendship outcomes

	Satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship quality	Satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship quantity	Number of intercultural friends	Level of friendship
L2 WTC of mainland students (N=53)	.279*	.373*	.185	.327*
L2 WTC of Hong Kong students (N=106)	.384*	.416*	.381*	.102

As shown in Table 3, significant correlations exist between L2 WTC and satisfaction with intercultural friendship in terms of quantity and quality. This finding is consistent with previous studies that WTC is positively correlated with intercultural friendship outcomes and

perceived satisfaction (Gareis et al., 2011; Gudykunst & Mody, 2002; Lu & Hsu, 2008; Ulu et al., 2015; Yashima, 2002). L2 WTC was correlated with the depth of friendship among mainland students ($r = 0.327$, $p < 0.05$) only and the number of mainland friends among local students ($r = 0.381$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the L2 WTC of mainland students is more related to the depth of intercultural friendship, while the L2 WTC of local students is more about the breadth of social networks.

Research question 3

Research question 3 examined the relationships between WTC, friendship variables and self-perceived L2 proficiency (see Table 4 below).

Table 4

Correlations between WTC, satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship and the perceived Cantonese proficiency of mainland and Hong Kong students

	Perceived Cantonese proficiency of mainland students (N=53)	Perceived Putonghua proficiency of Hong Kong students (N=106)
L2 WTC	.723**	.612**
Number of intercultural friends	.276	.334**
Satisfaction with the number of intercultural friends	.632*	.417**
Satisfaction with the quality of intercultural friendship	.087	.364**
Level of intercultural friendship	.292*	.167

Results showed that there was strong positive correlation between perceived L2 proficiency

and WTC, and between L2 proficiency and the satisfaction level of intercultural friendship. These trends are consistent with the findings of previous studies that language proficiency serves as the foundation of developing L2 WTC and intercultural friendship (Clément et al., 2003; MacIntyre, 2007). However, the perceived Cantonese proficiency of mainland students is not correlated with the number of local friends and the quality of friendship due to the fact that local students were more willing to speak Putonghua in the beginning stage of friendship development. This view is further supported by students in the interviews:

Even I have local friends, I seldom have a chance to practice my Cantonese as all of them speak Putonghua to me. (ML-05)

First, you have to speak Putonghua. If you want to make friends with them, you should not expect that they will speak your language... They are our guests, and we should show our respect to them by speaking Putonghua, though my Putonghua is not quite fluent (HK-14)

The above sharing showed that, Putonghua is more often used in students' conversations, and therefore less emphasis is placed on the development of friendship. It was further reconfirmed by the survey response of Hong Kong students, where their Putonghua proficiency was correlated with the number of mainland friends ($r = .334, p < 0.01$) as well as their level of satisfaction with the quantity ($r = .417, p < 0.05$) and quality of friendship ($r = .364, p < 0.05$).

In spite of the trend, no claim can be made that Cantonese proficiency is not important for mainland students, as it is correlated with their level of satisfaction with the friendship quality. Moreover, the survey showed that the level of friendship of mainland students was correlated with their Cantonese proficiency ($r = .292, p < 0.05$), meaning that mainland students who were fluent in Cantonese would be more likely to develop deeper relationships with local peers.

The interviews sought to find out whether L2 proficiency was the cause of the L2 WTC. The following replies were revealing about the viewpoints of mainland students:

When I am invited to local activities, I would first ask if they could speak Putonghua. If yes, then I would go. If it is all in English, I would be hesitate but I could still attend. If all Cantonese, I would surely not join (ML-06)

If they insist to use Cantonese... I will rather keep silent or leave. First, my Cantonese is so poor. Second, it would be fairer to use English, the second language for both of us. If you know that nobody knows what you are talking about, but you still insist, you should not expect others to follow (ML-04)

In the above sharing, L2 proficiency (Cantonese) obviously offered mainland students more linguistic confidence in intercultural conversations and activities. This finding is consistent with that of Kudo & Simkin (2003) that people with higher L2 proficiency and L2 WTC can communicate more often and more effectively with people from other cultures. Not only could they find intercultural interactions more rewarding; but it was helpful for the development of positive views among people from different groups as well. As L2 WTC could motivate students to learn L2 (MacIntyre, 20007; Yashima & Tanaka, 2001), schools should provide support to L2 learning directly rather than improving L2 WTC indirectly.

Research question 4

Research question 4 focused on the effect of demographic factors (gender, decision to stay after graduation and prior intercultural experience) on the WTC and the degree of satisfaction with intercultural friendship. The decision to stay after graduate was the item only applicable to mainland students. Results are shown in Table 5.1 and 5.2:

Table 5-1

T-test between gender, prior intercultural experience and decision to stay after graduate on WTC and satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship (Mainland students, N=53)

	L2 WTC	Satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship quality	Satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship quantity	Number of Hong Kong friends	Level of friendship
Gender	.239	.949	.434	.193	.880
Prior intercultural experience	.612	.574	.756	.823	.538
Decision to stay after graduate	.12	.159	.382	.634	.626

Table 5-2

T-test between gender, prior intercultural experience and decision to stay after graduate on WTC and satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship (Hong Kong students, N=106)

	L2 WTC	Satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship quality	Satisfaction level of mainland-HK friendship quantity	Number of mainland friends	Level of friendship
Gender	.408	.592	.131	.730	.536
Prior intercultural experience	.032*	.660	.795	.014*	.321
Decision to stay after graduate	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

In Table 5.1 and 5.2, there was no significant correlation between the demographics (gender, prior intercultural experience and “decision to stay after graduation”), WTC and satisfaction with mainland-HK friendship among mainland students. Among local students, however,

having prior intercultural experience was found correlated with L2 WTC ($t(100) = 2.17, p < 0.05$), and number of mainland friends ($t(100) = .14, p < 0.05$).

The finding is consistent with MacIntyre's (2001) and Sias's (2008) study, which identified "prior intercultural experience" as the key to WTC development. The quantitative survey of MacIntyre (2007) showed that "prior intercultural experience" could give more opportunities for L2 interactions and lead to better L2 proficiency, so people would be more likely to initiate communication with native-language speakers in the future. It is further supported by Sias's study, which suggested that the prior intercultural experience of students could increase their willingness and in some cases eagerness to build up friendship with the culture of the other groups (Sias et al., 2008). Consistent with their findings, students with prior intercultural experience were found in this study to have higher L2 WTC. Obviously, prior exchange could help them do better in the making of new intercultural friends although not necessarily raised their degree of satisfaction with the current quality of friendship.

In the interviews, some students further reported that how their prior experience encouraged their openness to other cultures and gained more understanding about themselves:

I like to explore new cultures and try to understand viewpoints or comments which may not be compatible with mine. The nationality is not my concern. I believe that we could explore interesting differences and lead to fruitful discussions due to different cultural or language backgrounds from non-local students. I like to find out and learn more about unexplored areas. It is always good for us. (HK-12)

I know more about my attractiveness during the exchange. Before this programme, I always think that my appearance was not attractive to foreigners. After visiting different countries, however, I realise that I am considered beautiful. This really brought me advantages in daily life... I am more tolerant towards other cultures

than I expect. (ML-03)

The above comments show that prior intercultural experience could serve as the cognitive and affective foundation for the development of friendship. It could lead to a more positive attitude towards intercultural interaction and views it as an opportunity to learn rather than a risk to their own culture. Moreover, it could also help students gain more understanding of how they are perceived by others.

However, it is worth noting that the significant impact of the prior intercultural experience was only found among local students. The majority of mainland students involved in this study were eager to learn about other cultures. As one mainland student expressed:

In general, those do want to study overseas would be more open-minded and with more tolerance for diverse opinions. Otherwise, they could just stay at home.

(ML-07)

Another unexpected finding is that, there was no significant difference between L2 WTC, satisfaction with mainland-HK friendship and “decision to stay after graduation” among mainland students. In previous literatures, it was frequently reported that non-locals would have a higher motivation to learn and use L2 WTC, and be more aggressive in making local friends if they decided to stay in the host-community after graduation (MacIntyre et al., 2001; MacIntyre et al., 1998). The unexpected absence of these correlations may be due to the large population of mainland students in Hong Kong, which allows mainland students to obtain enough emotional or information support from their co-national peers. In other words, they do not need to get information and thus less likely to take initiative to communicate with local peers.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationships among students' satisfaction with mainland-HK friendship, L2 WTC, self-perceived language proficiency and different demographic factors. It was found that mainland students reported as having more local friends than the number of mainland friends that Hong Kong students have. Consistent with previous research, the L2 WTC of students was correlated with their satisfaction about intercultural friendship. For mainland students, L2 WTC took a more important role in deepening friendship. For local students, L2 WTC mainly helped them to make more friends.

This study also showed that a greater L2 WTC and a higher degree of proficiency in Cantonese were reported as capable of leading to stronger links with local peers and deeper mutual understanding. Proficiency in Putonghua meanwhile would help Hong Kong students make friends with mainland students but not much in the deepening of friendship.

Lastly, the students' prior intercultural experience was found as important for developing L2 WTC and serve as the cognitive and affective foundation for developing intercultural friendship. Interview data further explained how intercultural experience helps students become more open to other cultures and gain a deeper understanding about their own strength in intercultural relationship. In contrast to previous literatures, mainland students reported little difficulty in developing friendship with local students. However, making local friends did not ensure meaningful contacts.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Many universities in Hong Kong do provide Cantonese learning courses. However, the effectiveness of these courses in enhancing intercultural friendship is doubtful. One of the reasons is that mainland students often underestimate the importance of Cantonese learning, since most of their conversations with locals are conducted in Putonghua (Chiu, 2014). In response to this situation, besides helping them attain a sufficient level of proficiency, the

language tutor should place more emphasis on the integrative role of Cantonese for friendship development. They should also encourage meaningful contact with their peers in Hong Kong through more school-led intercultural activities. Courses in social, multicultural and cross-cultural psychology, for example, should include activities which can enrich their experiences in the local community and require the use of Cantonese in the discussion of current social and personal issues. Moreover, experienced local students can be matched with mainland students for this purpose. Not only could this pairing-up help mainland students adjust to university life and provide positive intercultural experience for both local and mainland students, but also serves as the foundation for building long-lasting relationships.

7. LIMITATIONS

Although the present study has yielded findings that have both practical and research implications, its design was not without flaws. First, only students who reported having local or mainland friends were recruited. Students who had difficulties in making intercultural friends were simply left out in the enquiry. Further studies of these difficulties are needed. Second, all participants in this study were recruited from one university through convenience sampling, so the sample might not represent the general populations of mainland and Hong Kong students. While the findings of this study could provide a more comprehensive basis for further discussion, they might not be fully transferable to the case in another institution. Students should be recruited from a wider variety of universities in order to obtain more generalizable findings in future studies.

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Chapter 3: How intercultural friendships form

This chapter is published as a journal article in the *Chung Cheng Educational Studies*, which is entitled “From strangers to friends: The perceived challenges and expectations of friendship between mainland and Hong Kong students”.

Article 2: From strangers to friends: The perceived challenges and expectations of friendship between mainland and Hong Kong students

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Abstract

With the internationalization of higher education, Hong Kong has attracted more and more non-local students in the past decade, among whom mainland students have been the most predominant group. However, it seems that there is an accelerating tension between Hong Kong (HK) and mainland China, evidenced by the umbrella movement in 2014 and the anti-extradition protests in 2019. Nonetheless, studies on understanding friendship formation between these two “sibling cultural groups” are very limited. To fill this research gap, this study adopted a mixed-method approach to explore students’ perceived challenges of mainland-HK friendship formation through an online survey and a series of semi-structured interviews at one university in Hong Kong. It was found that language difference, cultural difference, and the lack of common topics were perceived as the three main challenges. First, the language difference caused more anxiety and reduced students’ willingness to communicate. Second, cultural difference was reflected in the perceived incompatibility of

working style, work-life balance, and values and beliefs. The cultural differences were attributed to the intercultural conflicts, while it also led to the difficulty in seeking common topics. Implications of the influential factors for mainland-HK friendship at the individual and contextual level were discussed. This study also shed lights on what roles the university should play in facilitating intercultural communication between local and non-local students.

Keywords

Intercultural communication; Intercultural friendship; friendship development; mainland-Hong Kong relationship

1. INTRODUCTION

As the trend of internationalization of higher education swept across the globe, universities have sought to attract more non-local students. In Hong Kong, the number of international students increased from 4,773 in 2005/06 to 18,060 in 2018/19, where 68.2% of them (or 12,322 students) were from mainland China (University Grants Committee, 2019). Arguably, mainland students have already become an indispensable population group on university campuses in Hong Kong. However, although Hong Kong shares a so-called “sibling culture” with mainland China (Zeng & Watkins, 2011), the formation of mainland-HK friendship has long been recognized as a challenging task. At the individual level, previous studies reported that there was a lack of opportunity for intercultural interaction between mainland students and with local-peers (Yu & Zhang, 2016). Also, most conversations between mainland and Hong Kong students were kept at a superficial level without sharing their true thoughts and feelings (Chiu, 2014; Lu, 1998). At the inter-group level, they also held incompatible views on university-life and different political convictions (Chiu, 2014; Ma, 2015). Addressing the above concerns, this study aims to explore the subjective expectation and difficulties that

mainland and Hong Kong students experienced in the process of intercultural friendship formation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The nature of friendship

Different from other compulsory and asymmetrical relationship (e.g. parent-child or supervisor-subordinate relationship), the voluntariness and spontaneity distinguish friendship from other interpersonal relationship (Beer, 2001; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). In general, the friendship choice is about the perceived similarity between each other. The emphasis of similarity could be traced back to ancient Greek Philosopher Plato, who proposed “similarity begets friendship”, while friendship is required for everyone to fulfil the basic social needs of having belongingness or being accepted by others. Aristotle also highlighted the perceived similarity and suggested that people love “those who are like themselves” (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010, p.34).

When examining the concept of friendship closely, however, it is perhaps too simplistic to link “perceived similarity” with friendship directly as it overlooks the complexity of interpersonal interaction. Recent studies tend to compare it from the relationship in the public realm, which suggests that friendship is more of a private relationship with high intimacy, which denotes trust, respect and fulfilling social and emotional needs (Kudo, Volet, & Whitsed, 2019).

Moreover, the emphasis of similarity is conflicting with intercultural friendship in nature, since both sides might have different cultural values and beliefs. For non-local students, however, friendship with local students is particularly important for their adaptation in the host society. At the university level, local friendship is positively associated with students’ satisfaction at school (Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014). At the individual level, friendship with local peers is

found to be correlated with lower psychological stress (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993) and better psychological adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990). Local friendship could also alleviate the psychological stress of non-local students by providing emotional support (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005). Since friendship development is a voluntary choice, issues of flexibility that characterize many friendship networks make it distinctive from other types of relationships.

2.2 Theories about friendship development

2.2.1 Friendship from the economic perspective

Emerson's Social Exchange Theory (SET) was a pioneering attempt to explain friendship development. It views social exchange as a social behaviour that may result both in economic and social outcomes (Emerson, 1976; Lambe, Wittmann, & Spekman, 2001). SET assumed that people would tend to make friends if the overall worth of such friendship, by subtracting its costs from the rewards it provides, is positive (West & Turner, 2010). In other words, friendship development in SET is the result of rational cost-benefit analysis. In SET, the decision of friendship development relies on the concept and expectation of others, which are largely shaped by the cultural environment they grew up (Chen, 2005).

Previously, SET received much criticism from researchers who considered friendship as an emotional social phenomenon. However, the concept of "cost of relationship development", such as the effort to overcome cultural differences or intercultural communication anxiety, has inspired its integration into the other friendship theories.

2.2.2 Friendship from the communication perspective

In contrast with Emerson's SET, Taylor and Altman (1987) focused on the role of communication in relationship development, instead of the reward-cost notions. They proposed Social Penetration Theory (SPT) and highlighted the core concept "self-disclosure".

SPT suggested that as friendships develop, people disclose more and more personal and

intimate details about themselves to one another (Taylor & Altman, 1987). In other words, communication elevates from relatively shallow to a greater depth of personal disclosure as relationships develop.

In friendship studies, however, SPT may not be enough to predict whether individuals become friends, but to explain how friendship grows over time. This may involve how individuals select conversation topics, and what conflicts were provoked during the interaction, such as the perceived similarity (Sias et al., 2008) or conflicting value between individuals on certain topics (Gareis, 2000; Sias et al., 2008).

2.2.3 Friendship from the socio-cognitive perspective

SPT focuses on communication at the individual level, rather than the personal background of people. However, some researchers suggested that the socio-cultural background of interlocutors, such as the self-perceived identity or cultural dimensions, would play a crucial role in intercultural friendship development.

For Social Identity Theory (SIT), for example, is the most popular theory which links the identity and intercultural friendship. SIT was first proposed by Tajfel (1981), who suggested that the establishment of social identity is a cognitive process about how people categorize and culturally identify themselves and others, while the self-perceived identity would shape their intercultural behaviours. Tajfel's theory has gained support from different empirical studies. For example, McPherson's study reported that individuals with strong home-cultural identity tend to initiate relationships with those with a similar demographic background (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). McPherson and his colleagues thus proposed "Homophily Principle", and suggested that the perceived similarity may include the evaluation of individual attitude, value, interest and belief. It may also include the demographic variables, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, education, and attractiveness. In the past, the Homophily

Principle also gained much support in local studies about mainland-HK friendship. For example, it is found that common interests, topics or goals were often reported as the key components of successful friendship formation, while such commonality could offer people an information shortcut for reducing the cost for exploring others and social uncertainty (Leung & Yu, 2020; Ruan & Zhu, 2015).

The studies about socio-cultural similarity is also a major direction of cross-cultural comparative study, where Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory (CDT) is often adopted. Hofstede's CDT focused on the friction, instead of the motivation of intercultural contact. It is built on Hofstede's Cultural Distance Theory (2001) in the earlier age, which assumed that people with cultural distance would have more friction during intercultural interactions. CDT offered a framework with six cultural dimensions: (i) power distance; (ii) individualism versus collectivism; (iii) long-term orientation versus short-term orientation; (iv) uncertainty avoidance; (v) masculinity versus femininity; and (vi) indulgence versus restraint. In the past, the six cultural dimensions of CDT have been widely adopted to explain the attitude or behavioural differences in different cultural groups, such as the expectation of friendship (Baumgarte, 2016), friendship behaviour (Rybak & McAndrew, 2006), interdependence and relatedness to others (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003), resistance against outgroup cultures (Simth & Khawaja, 2011) and the pursuit of work-life balance (Forsyth, 2010).

2.2.4 Friendship from the socio-psychological perspective

Comparing with previous theories, researchers from the socio-psychological perspective have a relatively narrower focus on individuals' behaviour. They tried to identify different predictors of successful intercultural communication, such as second language proficiency, openness to other cultures or multicultural attitude.

In this approach, Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) is often used to explain the intercultural communication process. ICT suggested that increasing intercultural contact is the key to successful relationship development as it allows individuals to gain mutual understanding, reduce uncertainty, and diminish prejudice and bias (Allport, 1954; Binder et al., 2009).

Allport's theory has gained extensive support from different studies. For example, the meta-analysis of Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, and Christ (2011) reviewed 515 intercultural studies and reported that more intercultural contact could help individuals gain greater trust and mitigate intergroup bias. Dovidio and his colleagues (2011) also reported that intercultural contact is also effective in the digital world. The Internet could offer indirect and imaginary contact to users, which helped them develop a sense of group-inclusiveness by sharing some characteristics with out-group cultures before they come into contact in person. No matter the students were exposed to the intercultural contact via the online or offline platform, it is generally agreed that it would help students better prepare for intercultural interaction.

2.3 Overview of the friendship studies in the local context

Previously, most explorative studies about mainland-HK friendship focused on the view of non-local students. Ruan & Zhu (2015), for example, interviewed 209 mainland students and summarized three main challenges of their local friendships: (i) language barrier; (ii) cultural difference in values and ideologies; and (iii) view difference in academic orientation and future plan. Cheung (2013) examined the academic adaptation experience of 312 mainland students. His study reported that mainland students do not have particular academic difficulties, compared with their perceived challenges in language, social and cultural, and financial aspects. Yu & Zhang also examined the acculturation experience of mainland students, while their study highlighted how they experienced challenges in their political identification and perceived discrimination (Yu & Zhang, 2016). By contrast, Tian's study

(2017) focused on the context of mainland-HK friendship, which reported that mainland students are lack of opportunities to interact with local peers due to (i) fragmented daily living space; (ii) defended interpersonal space, and (iii) politicized online space.

Different from the above views, some studies shifted to a narrow focus on the impact of certain key indicators, such as the role of host-language proficiency in different social contexts. Zeng (2006), for example, explored the role of Cantonese and English in the adaptation process of mainland students. She reported that Cantonese proficiency is used mainly in the context of social integration, while their English proficiency was used frequently in academic activities. In recent years, Yu (2016) focused on the academic adaptation of mainland students. She further examined the role of English and Cantonese in engaging classroom discussions, attending the lecture and reading academic articles, while the language barrier was highlighted in the group projects and other collaborative assignments with local peers.

2.4 The research gap

The above literatures have provided useful insights for examining friendship formation. Nevertheless, friendship development needs to be explored further between the mainland and Hong Kong students.

First, most western intercultural studies involved non-local students from other non-English speaking countries, which has a large cultural distance with the host-community (Peng, 2006; Vaccarino & Dresler-Hawke, 2011; Yu & Shen, 2012). However, their findings may not fit the development of mainland-HK friendship, which shared a similar language system and sibling culture. In particular, many local studies reported that identity and cultural difference between mainland and Hong Kong Chinese is often underestimated (Mau, 2005).

Second, in most intercultural studies, non-local students are considered to be a “vulnerable” population in terms of social status, political power, and cultural prestige (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). Yet this assumption may not fit the mainland-HK relationship as the central government has an over-riding political power over Hong Kong. Although Mainlanders are technically minority in Hong Kong, they should not be considered a vulnerable population.

Third, most intercultural studies focused on the view of non-local students. The voice of the majority, though heard, is often underrepresented in intercultural studies (Gareis, 2012). However, it always takes two people in any friendship formation. Recent researchers tried to include more local students' view in the intercultural friendship study (Leung & Yu, 2019; Tian, 2017), whereas there is a lack of a comprehensive and systematic analysis about how local students explain or respond to the criticism of mainland students. For example, mainland students perceived “disapproval of certain mentality and behaviours” as the main challenge of friendship development with local peers, it is needed to be further explored how local views the same issues to see if there is any misunderstanding.

Forth, most local studies about mainland-HK friendship were conducted before 2016, where Putonghua Education was still not popular in Hong Kong. According to government statistics in 2015/16, 71.3% primary schools and 36.4% secondary schools have already used Putonghua in over 50% of lesson time of the Chinese Language subject (Legislative Council, 2016). It is believed that the Putonghua proficiency of local university students has been greatly improved in recent years, which changed the linguistic environment for intercultural interactions. Moreover, there was a rapid growing tension between mainland China and Hong Kong in 2019, where the social context of friendship development has become far more complicated and calls for an urgent need to revisit this topic.

Addressing the above concerns, this study aims to examine the challenges and expectations perceived by both mainland and Hong Kong students in the process of intercultural friendship formation. To guide the discussion, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1. What expectation do the mainland and Hong Kong students have on each other in their friendship?

RQ2. What are the perceived challenges of intercultural friendship formation between the mainland and Hong Kong students?

RQ3. How do these challenges affect the interaction between the mainland and Hong Kong students?

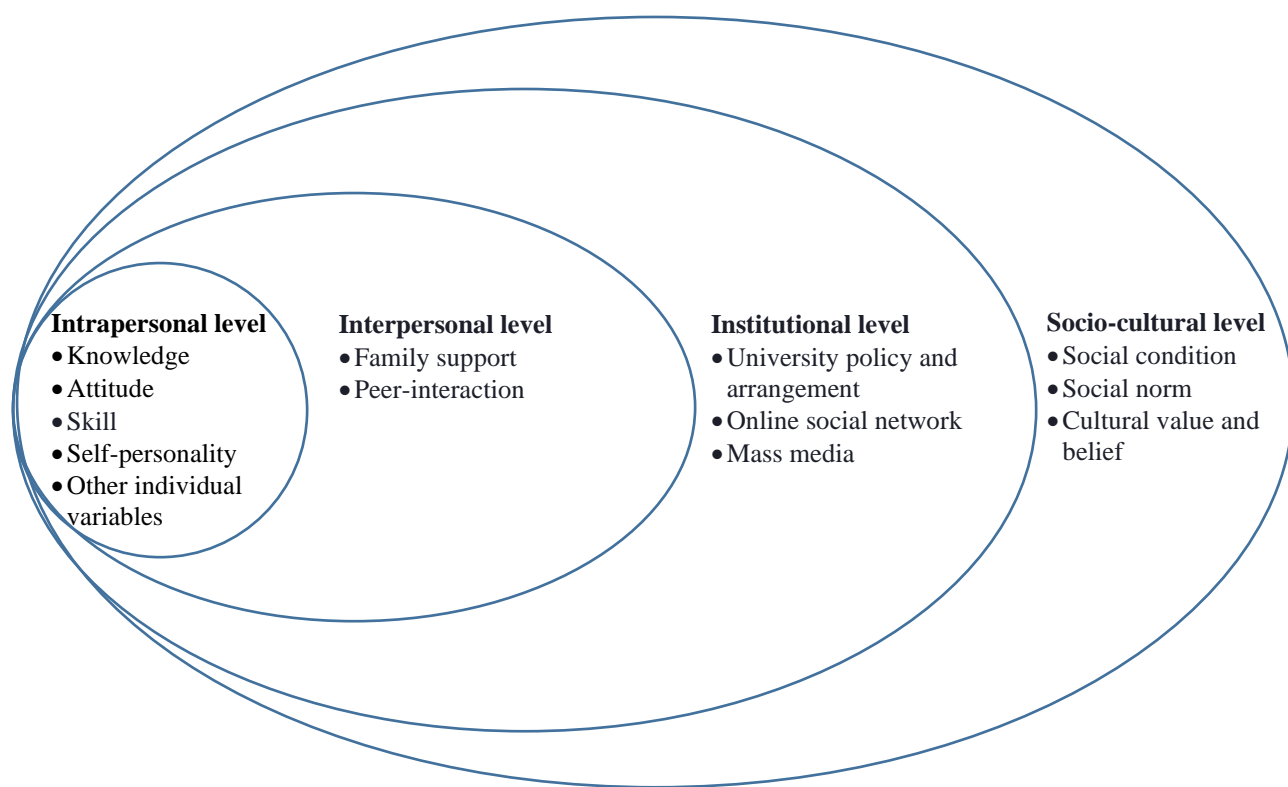
2.5 The research framework

To explore the complex interaction amongst different factors, this study adopted Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Model (SEM) with modification. SEM is a well-known theory-based framework for understanding the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that drive behaviour (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). It is widely adopted in different friendship studies to examine the impact of different factors, such as the role of network and peer influences (McMillan, Felmlee, & Osgood, 2018), family Interaction (Sheppard, 2012), and the intergroup attitudes at a social level (Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2019).

In SEM, Bronfenbrenner grouped different influential factors in 4-level: (i) intrapersonal (microsystem); (ii) interpersonal (mesosystem); (iii) institutional (exosystem); and (iv) socio-cultural (macrosystem) (see Figure 1) (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The policy level (e.g. national, state, local laws) would not be explored in detail as it is less related to intercultural friendship at the individual level.

Figure 1

Modified Socio-ecological framework and underpinning factors influencing mainland-HK friendship



At the core of SEM is the intrapersonal level (microsystem), which also includes the person's natural genetic makeup. Factors include demographic variables (e.g., gender, age) (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001), personality (Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004), personal history and other individual dispositions that impact intercultural communication behaviour.

The interpersonal level (mesosystem) concerns the environment with immediate influence on the level of self-disclosure about family and school. Addressing the recent social unrest in Hong Kong, for example, the non-local student may receive different opinions about controversial issues from family, school, local peers and co-national peers, and they may align themselves with their peer's view, rather than their parents' opinions.

The institutional level (exosystem) refers to the institutional settings that affect development, but are not as directly involved. In the friendship studies among university students, it includes the university-led events (i.e. cultural tours, buddy programme, host-language course), student-led programme (i.e. Sports team or student's union) or the school arrangement (dormitory, joint assignments or group work in the lecture) (Leung & Yu, 2020).

Another example is the contextual influence on friendship development through online-social networks (OSN). Compared with face-to-face (FTF) interaction, OSN is regarded as a platform that facilitates the depth and breadth self-disclosure with its anonymous nature (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002). At this level, the present study also examined how two or more of the environments interact to affect friendship development.

The socio-cultural level (macrosystem), involves the culture that indirectly shapes the individual's mindset and communication behaviour, including customs, attitudes, values, and worldview (Smith & Hamon, 2016). It also involves subjective norms, such as the individual's perceptions of social pressures to perform or not to perform particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, it would involve the incompatibility of cultural difference between Hong Kong and mainland cultures and reflected in the sharing of intercultural conflict in daily interactions.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This research investigated the perceived challenges and expectations of friendship between the mainland and Hong Kong students. It adopted the mixed-method exploratory study design, which included an online survey (N=159) and semi-structured interviews (N=24). The mixed-method design is chosen because it provided multiple data sources for “methodological triangulation”. Not only could the interviews supplement the information about trends or frequencies from the survey and offer a view of different clusters for analysing the research

problem (Creswell, 2009), they also enabled the researcher to better understand the participant's social world through a more in-depth exploration of their friendships (Flick, 2002).

3.1.1 Exploratory phase

The first phase was exploratory. It involved a self-report online survey that aimed to give a portrait of the general patterns of intercultural friendship formation. In this phase, the students were invited to propose some key contributing factors of friendship formation according to their experience, while different proposed factors were open-coded and reduced through axial coding. The self-reported approach allowed participants to describe their own experiences, rather than the researcher making inferences from observing participants. The findings guided the interview direction to prevent any unintended intervention from the personal values or subjective understanding of researchers (Miller & Glassner, 2004).

3.1.2 Explanatory phase

The second phase was an explanatory interview. The student in phase one was randomly invited to describe how their intercultural friendship was built and how they overcome the challenges in the process. Also, in this section students were invited to share their understanding and expectation on intercultural friendship. Some sample questions included, "How do you define "friend"? And is there any difference when you make an intercultural friend?" or "What motivates you to build up an intercultural friendship?" The objective of the phase was to examine how students perceived the challenges and how they ascribe the mainland-HK friendship development to their experience. It also provided supplementary data to triangulate with the quantitative findings and enrich the follow-up discussion.

3.2 Sampling and criteria

In the quantitative phase, all students (Year 2 or above in undergraduate or postgraduate programme) were recruited from a university in Hong Kong. All of them reported as having an intercultural friendship before completing the online survey (see Section 9.3), which took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

After the quantitative phase, the students were randomly selected and invited to share their experience in the semi-structured interview (see Section 9.4). Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to complete and was in a one-to-one setting. It allows both researcher and the participant to focus on the targeted issue and freely express their attitudes, thoughts, and experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

To qualify for participation, all participants were required to fulfil the following criteria: (a) being enrolled in a full-time undergraduate or postgraduate programme; (b) reported having an intercultural friendship, and known that friend for at least one year; (c) The reported friendship was not a romantic relationship, and (d) the participant (mainland students only) were the newly-arrived students in Hong Kong and had not lived in Hong Kong before the current study programme).

3.3 Data collection

To ensure the consistency of the interview, the researcher would conduct and transcribe the interviews in person. Not only could it ensure the consistency of the focus of the interview, but it also helped the researcher gain in-depth knowledge and awareness of the interviews. All interviews were conducted in a one-to-one setting, so that the participant could have the privacy to express themselves without any third party interference (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). The interview would be conducted in Cantonese or Putonghua, dependent on the mother-tongue of interviewee. All interviews were digitally recorded so that the researcher could focus on the interview and raise any follow-up questions immediately without taking

lengthy notes. After the first round of transcription, each quotation was back-translated to ensure they could convey the most precise meaning expressed by the interviewee.

3.4 Data Management and analysis

The quantitative data would be presented descriptively as frequency and percentage bar-charts. The items with the three highest percentages were extracted and compared between the mainland and Hong Kong students. They also served as the framework for analysing the interview data.

For the qualitative data, constant-comparison approach was used to manage the interview data and the self-reported data (proposed challenges and influential factors) in the survey. In the constant-comparison approach, the data collection and analysis are not processed in an independent phase, but a continuous cycle (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The new data was continuously compared with the initial categories, and a new category would be created if the new data could not be embedded in any group.

After the data extraction, the findings from the survey and the interview would be combined through a process of triangulation that allows the discussion to link and refer both data set at the same time through convergence and corroboration (Creswell, Klassen, Clark, & Smith, 2011). In the “finding and discussion” section, the socio-ecological model would be introduced and guide the discussion section, so that the reader could easily make sense of the findings in the broader frameworks and understand how different factors interact with each other at different levels.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

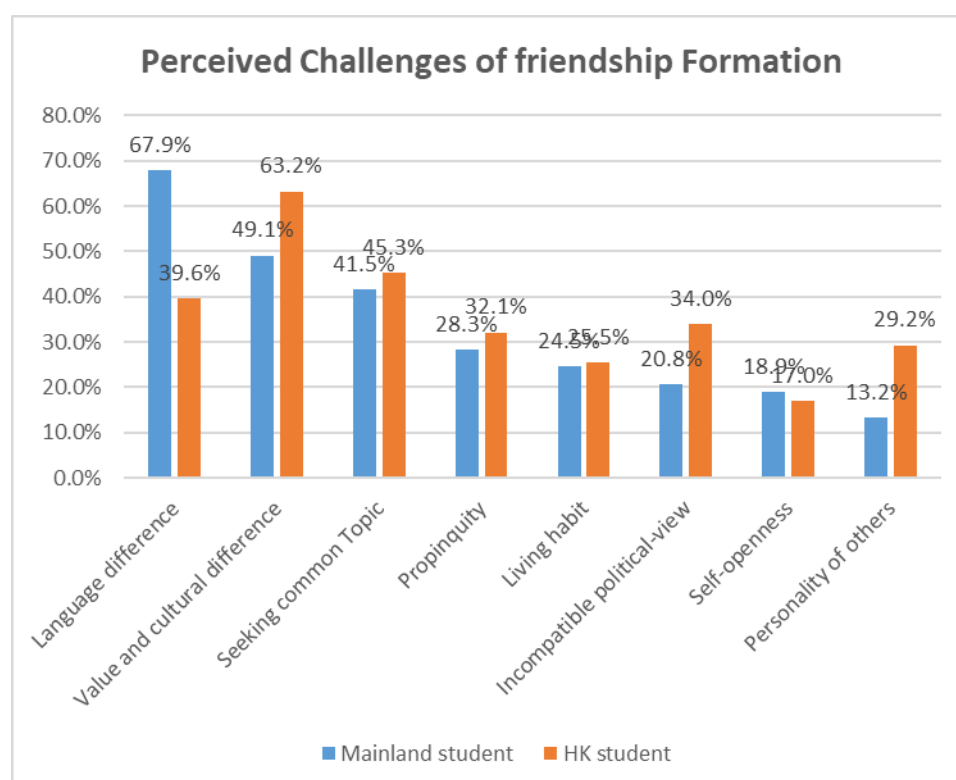
4.1 Perceived challenges of intercultural friendship formation

In the survey, the participants were 16.7% male (N=29) and 81.3% female (n = 130), which is similar to the gender ratio of the university. The participants were recruited from both mainland

(N=53, 33.1%) and Hong Kong (N=106, 66.7%), which approximated the ethnic composition of the university as a whole. The participants were of a mean of 21.6 years of age (SD = 3.12, range 18 to 35). The results are shown below:

Figure 2

Perceived challenges of intercultural friendship formation (mainland student (N=53), Hong Kong student (N=106))



The above figure shows the perceived challenges of intercultural friendship (IF) formation among mainland and Hong Kong students. Each mainland student proposed 2.81 items on average, which is slightly less than that of the Hong Kong students (3.14). From the table, several patterns can be observed.

First, the top-three challenges as perceived by mainland and Hong Kong students are the same. However, 67.9% of mainland students reported “language difference” as the major challenge, which is almost two times as those of Hong Kong students. It is followed by “value difference”

(49.1%) and “having a common topic” (41.5%), where both of them are about the content of conversations. In the view of local students, “value difference” (63.2%) is reported as the main challenge of IF formation, followed by “seeking common topics” (45.3%) and “language difference” (39.6%).

Second, environmental factors (e.g. propinquity) and individual attributes (self-openness and personality of others) were not the top priorities. The findings suggest that the students tend to focus on the items that have direct impacts on them, rather than individual or environment factors.

Third, the local students tended to propose more items than mainland students in almost all categories (except language difference and self-openness). This indicates that the local student may be more sensitive to the challenges of intercultural friendships than their mainland student counterparts.

4.2 Student’s expectation about intercultural friendship

Based on quantitative findings, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how students perceive and interpret the above findings. In total, twenty-four students, including twelve mainland and twelve Hong Kong students, shared their experiences. Although students’ expectation about friendship are most often examined at the intrapersonal level, it is also shaped by the students’ background and culture.

In the interviews, the students were asked about how they conceptualize “friends” and “intercultural friends”. A degree of consensus was found in both sides, such as giving mutual help (N=5) or having similar value or common interest (N=5). However, it is observed that the students placed different expectations about “what behaviour a friend should have”.

4.2.1 Vulnerability and interpersonal boundary

For local students, trust was the major basis for friendship, which can be identified by their emphasis on personal vulnerability:

Trustworthiness is the key component, which is reflected in whether you could keep the secret. If you say something to your friend, and everyone knows about it tomorrow. Then you have wrongly dedicated your trust (HK-04)

Friends would not spread your secrets behind you (HK-02)

In the above sharing, the Hong Kong students emphasized the issue of vulnerability, which is about how they predict risk after the self-disclosure. Yet the concern of vulnerability was not mentioned by any mainland student. By contrast, they show more awareness about the friend's responsibility to "help" others:

A friend should have the correct value and do the right things together. If someone goes wrong, the other should help him choose the right direction, instead of letting him make the mistakes (ML-06)

If my friend come to my hometown for exchange, I am sure that we do our best to take care of them and show our warm hospitality. However, I didn't see any Hong Kong people having such awareness (ML-10)

As the host, Hong Kong students could take the initiative to introduce... I wanted someone to tell me what I should be aware of, instead of waiting for us to ask. It makes me look stupid and impolite (ML-04)

In the above sharing, the mainland students expected that a friend's responsibility is to bring others on the right track, even if they need to intervene others. They also held a similar expectation on the local peers, which was reflected in their criticism of the local people in

terms of lacking hospitality. Addressing their criticism, however, a Hong Kong student expressed his concern about the private boundary of others, even for their friend's sake:

I will observe others carefully and will not be too aggressive in offering help. You will look down on him, if he wants to do it himself and did not need your help at all (HK-03)

4.2.2 Pursuing the similarity

Regarding the criteria for making intercultural friends, the mainland students placed more emphasis on similarity:

People with similar personality would be easier to befriend. For example, I am introverted to engage public activities. I will be less likely to befriend with outgoing peers (ML-05)

Friends should hold the similar values or worldview, as well as giving a similar response towards the same thing (ML-01)

The local students also mentioned similarity. However, it is not about the personality, but whether they have common interests with each other. As mentioned by a Hong Kong student:

Having common interest and conversation topics is the foundation of friendship development... Your personality does not need to match with each other. An optimistic guy could befriend with a pessimistic one (HK-08)

4.2.3 Representing their home-country

In the interview, it is interesting to note that some mainland students seemed to play the role of “cultural ambassador”, which aimed to resolve intergroup bias. For example:

The media often presents a biased image of Hong Kong and China. Through my

friendship with local, we could gain the mutual understanding of each other and reduce the media bias (ML-06).

It could reduce the bias of each other, and let Hong Kong students gain more understanding about current China (ML-05)

By contrast, no Hong Kong students reported that they are representing the bright side of “Hong-Konger”. Instead, their major motivation in making mainland friends was their curiosity with mainland culture (N=6).

4.2.4 Discussion

The above conceptual differences could be explained through individualism/collectivism dimensions in Hofstede’s CDT. Previous cross-cultural studies reported that people from collectivist society are more concerned about practical helpfulness, while those from more individualist cultures tend to have a social network with fewer obligations (Baumgarte, 2016). Rybak and McAndrew’s study also reported that people in collectivist society would keep observe others and actively intervene when they feel someone is in need (Rybak & McAndrew, 2006). This specific expectation among collectivists is described by Baumgarte as the “intervener culture”, where all people are expected to be sensitive to whether one resents being taken care of.

Translating this argument into our context, it is reflected in the tendency of mainland students in actively intervening others. At the same time, they are confused about the lack of hospitality of Hong Kong people. In this study, such a collectivist mind-set is also reflected in the obedience-oriented value in the classroom, as well as the self-expectation of mainland students. They view themselves as a representative to eliminate the cultural bias towards their whole cultural group.

Beer (2001) further explained the collectivist mind-set through the background environment. His study of rural-urban social disparity suggested that resource distribution is not guaranteed in rural subsistence economies. Mutual help was thus necessary for non-local students to survive. This environment gradually shaped the concept of friendship in collectivist society into a more instrumental-oriented approach based on the material exchange (Beer, 2001), and resulted in a higher expectation of hospitality than those from the urbanized area. Unfortunately, such values may not match an urbanized individualistic culture, which emphasizes assertiveness, self-sufficiency over interdependence and relatedness (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

4.3 How the perceived challenges affect the friendship formation

The previous section revealed the subconscious expectations of the mainland and Hong Kong students due to their diverse background cultures. This section further explored how students perceived the impact of above-mentioned challenges.

4.3.1 Intrapersonal level: Language difference

As a communication barrier. In the survey, most mainland (67.9%) and Hong Kong students (39.6%) noted that “language difference” is their major challenge of intercultural friendship formation. This finding was reconfirmed by the qualitative interviews, where over half of the mainland and Hong Kong students consider it as a communication barrier. For example:

When I am invited to local activities, I would first ask if they could speak Putonghua. If yes, then I would go. If they speak English, I will hesitate, but still join it. If they only speak Cantonese, I would surely not go (ML-06)

My Putonghua pronunciation is not accurate. It is so embarrassing when they told me that (HK-05)

The above sharing showed that poor language proficiency would limit students' expression and their willingness to participate in intercultural events. Different from the findings in other foreign studies, mainland students were not eager to learn Cantonese despite acknowledging their host-language deficiency. One of the reasons is that most university lectures were conducted in English, which still allowed them to get high grades without learning Cantonese. Moreover, at the individual level, local-language proficiency (Cantonese) is not necessary for mainland students when communicating with their local peers because most local students can speak Putonghua.

When I talk with mainland friends, I always use Putonghua, though my Putonghua is poor. I think using their language is a way to show our respect, especially they are our "guest" (HK-08)

When we have dinner, my local friend understands our difficulty and always uses Putonghua in most conversation (ML-07)

Most interviewees reported that they speak Putonghua in most social contexts, and the local student would accommodate them during interactions. Thus, learning Cantonese was not necessary for their social or academic adaptation. In contrast to local's accommodating approach, some mainland students consider Putonghua as taken-for-granted. For example:

Some local people do not want to speak Putonghua. It is not about their ability, but their willingness. "Why should I speak Putonghua? Why don't you put more effort to assimilate yourself into the Hong Kong community?" (ML-03)

As argued by Zhang (2015), it is probably because of "their ideological bias against Cantonese, as a regional Chinese dialect, in contrast to the Putonghua as an official language and English as an international language around the world.

Since learning host-language was not necessary for academic and social adaptation, the mainland students were not keen on learning Cantonese. The main exception was for instrumental purposes, such as attending the Cantonese-speaking modules at university or planning to stay in Hong Kong after their graduation.

As a symbol of showing respect to the local culture. Although Cantonese was not considered as necessary for effective communication, it does not mean learning Cantonese was useless.

This study found that Cantonese-learning serves an integrating purpose. For example:

If you speak Cantonese, Hong Kong people would think that you are willing to learn their language and integrate into the local culture. (ML-10)

She will join the Cantonese research... It makes me feel that she is willing to learn something from Hong Kong (HK-02)

From the above sharing, Cantonese-learning was considered a way of showing respect to local cultures and to make a positive impression on other, which facilitates the further development of intercultural friendship.

Discussion. Similar to previous literature (Sias et al., 2008; Vaccarino & Dresler-Hawke, 2011), this study showed that language difference is perceived as the main challenge by both mainland and Hong Kong students. It would limit the individual to express feelings and emotions in the relationship, even though they shared a similar Chinese-character writing system. It would also make non-local students hesitant to join intercultural activities.

The response of mainland students was somewhat unique as they did not have strong motivation to learn host-language (Cantonese), although they acknowledge that it is a communication barrier. It is because the local student would accommodate mainland peers and

use L2 (mainly Putonghua, and sometimes English), which is not their mother-tongue. Learning Cantonese is thus not necessary for their social and academic adaptation.

Such unexpected findings could be explained through Hofstede's individualism/collectivism dimension between China and Hong Kong. In Smith and Khawaja's study (2011), it is found that the collectivist students often desire to maintain their heritage sociocultural behaviours and values. By contrast, students from individualistic society are more inclined to a collaboration style and choose the communication-oriented language, rather than the language they are most familiar with. In the current study, this is reflected in their language choice, where the local students would accommodate others. However, it also makes mainland students less motivated in learning Cantonese.

Cantonese may not be necessary for effective intercultural communication. However, this study revealed that learning Cantonese is an important symbol for mainland students to show the respect of local culture, as well as their willingness to integrate into the local community.

4.3.2 Interpersonal level: Seeking common topic between each other

Undesirable topics: Experience-sharing, aesthetic judgment. In the survey, a significant proportion of the mainland (41.5%) and Hong Kong students (45.3%) reported difficulties in finding a common topic during interactions. The interviews provided some examples of failed attempts:

Once she asked us how many scores I have got in the University Entrance Exam, I replied that I joined the HKDSE (local exam) only... We became embarrassing, and kept silent afterwards (HK-05)

Once we had eye contact, she suddenly said, "You really look like XX (a pop-star)." I really don't know who she is (ML-12)

We do not have many common topics. For example, both of us like computer games, but we often play different games. The popular cultures between the mainland and Hong Kong are totally different (ML-04)

From the above quotes, the most common failed experiences stemmed from conversation topics about previous experiences or pop-culture, which highlighted that they were come from different cultural environment.

Welcomed topics: Task- and future-oriented sharing. Most participants with successful friendship suggested that they tend to focus on the common concerns in the present or future.

For example:

We often share the difficulties of study or school-life. Sometimes we would imagine what our future will be, and discuss how to discipline our kids. Also, we would discuss how to communicate with parents (HK-08)

We have talked on the phone for hours about my struggle of joining overseas exchange programme. I have to defer my study for one year if I take the chance... she has given me so many advice (ML-09)

We would talk about everything, such as what oversea programme is opened for enrolment recently, what funding or competition we could apply, or how we could better prepare the proposal ... We always share the information about the internship with each other (ML-08)

The interview showed that the most welcomed topics between students includes romantic relationship (N=7), their private relationship with parents and siblings (N=6) and difficulties in academic study (N=7). It is worth noting that the sharing of a deep-secret (e.g. a romantic

relationship) often marks the advanced level of friendship and spurs friendship development rapidly. For example:

She unintendedly lets me know her secret crush and is worried very much. I then shared mine to reassure her... We know the secret crush of each other. This is the specific topic that is only shared between us (HK-03)

Once she has talked about her boyfriend that he refused to buy the flat before marriage and looks like a “mummy's boy”. She rarely shared this with me, and I think that she considered me as her best friend at that time (HK-08)

The above sharing showed that, although finding an appropriate topic is challenging, it is not impossible. It depends on whether the student knows the key and leads the conversation in the right way.

Discussion. Consistent with previous literatures, seeking a common topic between mainland and Hong Kong students is reported to be a challenging task. Addressing the above concern, this study explored the content of self-disclosure in different intercultural friendships, particularly what topics the students with successful friendship chose. The findings showed that future-oriented and task-oriented sharing are more desirable topics. Also, the self-disclosure about personal information and relationship, such as the romantic or family relationship, can accelerate friendship development to a higher level. Such disclosure of personal secrets could show one's trust and vulnerability to others, which in turns help students gain social support. By contrast, some successful experience in the intracultural friendship, such as the sharing previous experience or favourite pop-culture (e.g. pop-music or movie), was less helpful to build the mainland-HK friendships.

The result is not entirely consistent with previous studies, which highlighted “common interest” as the key to developing an intercultural friendship (Ruan & Zhu, 2015). It is probably

because the personal interest is shaped by cultural background of individuals. Such improper sharing would in turn amplify the perceived cultural differences between each other. By contrast, they have ample opportunities to interact with each other in the school campus, while they would have similar concerns with academic studies, such as their study plans, course selection or overseas exchange programme. They could share experiences and advice between each other, which shows their care with a more intense and mutually-supportive involvement.

4.3.3 Institutional level: The role of university and extra-curricular activities

Somewhat surprisingly, the contextual factors, such as propinquity or the social context, were not recognized as the challenge by both local students (N=15, 28.3%) and mainland students (N=34, 32.1%). The finding is not consistent with previous literature, which suggested that institutional proximity (e.g. domicile proximity or in-class discussion) should be a key feature that most initial interactions appeared to take place (Kudo et al., 2019). It is probably because all participants already had intercultural friends before this study. Thus, they have already explored their own way to meet each other regularly. By contrast, this study revealed that the intercultural friendship is more likely to be developed in student-led activities, where the student could meet regularly and work on the same task (such as a debate team or sports-team).

The interviews showed how university-led activities and intercultural collaboration for academic study is helpful, but less dominant in friendship formation. As one participant explained:

I also joined the Orientation-camp (O-camp). However, I totally get lost. Everyone speaks Cantonese there. At that time, I feel so cordial even I heard English (ML-06)

You would become familiar with local friends in O-camp as you work and live together with them for days... I joined every reunion event, whereas it is so difficult to keep contact if you are not in the same major. You are not in the same world, it is

hard to find any common topic (ML-04)

Study together is only the beginning. If you choose other modules next semester, you may not contact with each other again (ML-07)

The above sharing shows that the one-shot event of the university may initiate the intercultural contact, whereas it did not consider about how students maintain and develop the relationship afterwards. In the interview, the students also acknowledged the limitation of the university manager. In their view, therefore, the role of university is to provide a platform only, yet it could not guarantee anything. They tend to attribute the successful friendship development to their own personality traits.

4.3.4 Socio-cultural level: Cultural Difference

In the survey, 49.1% mainland and 63.2% Hong Kong student proposed “cultural difference” as their main challenge of intercultural friendship formation, while they further expressed their view in the interview.

As a source of conflict: Concept and value-priority. The first reported cultural difference was the incompatible study attitudes and working styles. From the mainland students’ view, academic study is always put on their top priority, while they often criticized the slow working-progress of Hong Kong students, and described them as “deadline-fighter” (people who only start working right before the due date):

Most of Hong Kong friends are deadline fighters. I always need to urge them to start working earlier (ML-07)

Mainland students always want to start working earlier. However, Hong Kong students always say, “It is so early! We could discuss later (ML-03)

At the same time, however, Hong Kong students were also criticized by mainland students as having poor time-managements:

I have a strong sense of time, and I expect all people will come on time at every meeting. However, no one will come on time, and they do not care about it (ML-07)

Addressing the above criticism, Hong Kong students did not think that “being slow” or “being a deadline-fighter” is problematic. In their view, it is just another working style, and even a symbol of effectiveness:

Why could the Hong Kong student be a deadline-fighter, but get a good score in the exam? It is because they are familiar with the course outline and fully understand the content in every lesson (HK-04)

I consider myself a good student. Someone will strive for excellence, but I know my limitation. I would be satisfied if I had already tried my best (HK-02)

The above findings showed the belief that “being a deadline fighter” is not a symbol of being chaotic, but a symbol of effective work or another working style. To Hong Kong students, achieving the highest score is not always their top priority.

The second cultural difference was reflected in students’ view on what meaningful university life or a good university student should be. Again, the mainland students put more emphasis on their academic performance and working efficiency than Hong Kong students. For example:

Many Hong Kong students would do their part-time in the school day and be absent from the class. I don’t understand why they scarify their study for those part-time jobs (ML-04)

Their family may not give enough financial support to them, so they need to earn living expenses as well. It is also an opportunity for learning. Being a student,

however, I still think that we should not focus too much on earning money (ML-03)

The debate of incompatible value-priority was extended to classroom discipline. In the interviews, both mainland and Hong Kong students agreed that all students should show respect to the teacher, whereas they often had a different understanding of “disrespectful behaviour”. The mainland students tend to emphasize their obedience to the rules and guidelines. For example:

In the mainland, eating is strictly prohibited in all classrooms. However, the Hong Kong students seem not to care about it and puts different lunch-box on the table during the lecture (ML-07)

The local students would ask for a deferral of their assignment at the last minute... Sometimes, they would even ask for changing topics or being exempted from certain assignments, just because they have no time to work on it. It is very unfair to us (ML-09)

At the same time, however, the local students also criticized that some mainland students did not show enough respect to lecturers. In contrast to the classroom obedience, they focused more on students’ attitude towards the lecturer:

I will still listen and respect what lecturers say, even I do not fully agree with them. However, the mainland students would persist in their view, argue with the lecturer and forced everyone to follow (HK-04)

The mainland student would come to the teacher desk and ask questions directly, even the lecturer is talking with others. It is so impolite (HK-02)

As an attractive feature. Although cultural difference was often reported as a source of conflict, some students viewed it as the attractive characteristics. For example:

When I was in mainland China, I could only read the one-sided or biased view from the censored media. However, I could learn more from my friend and learn that my understanding is only about the minority view (ML-08)

The local friendship improves my understanding of Hong Kong and makes my life more convenient... she gave me many pieces of advice when I rent the hostel (ML-10)

The maximum benefit (of mainland-HK friendship) is to gain a more diverse experience. When you interact with them, they would also change / enhance your mind-set (HK-08)

In the interview, both ML-08 and ML10 reported that they plan to stay in Hong Kong after graduation, which probably helps to explain why they are more likely to embrace the local culture. In the interview, they also suggested that friendships could let them learn more about the local situation, such as the political structure of local society (ML-06; ML-10), the way to find jobs and the pursuit of further study in local universities (ML-04; ML-05).

How students respond to the cultural conflict. Addressing the cultural difference, both Hong Kong and mainland students highlighted the importance of mutual understanding and openness towards others. For example:

We have to accept each other in terms of value and the task-relationship balance (HK-02)

After the conversation, I learnt that most Hong Kong students have to work to support themselves, or even pay for the tuition fee. Few would come by choice. By contrast, most mainland students are fully supported by their family (ML-03)

Regarding the incompatible working style, the students with successful friendships tended to appreciate, or even try to learn from others. Indeed, it also motivated them to further develop the relationship. For example:

I would like to learn their learning attitude, and also how they plan everything meticulously. I am always slow and lazy (HK-02)

Hong Kong students start their project late, but their outcome is sometimes better than us (ML-03)

What I appreciate the Hong Kong student... Although their life is stressful, they would not limit themselves in one place (ML-08)

Discussion. In this study, cultural difference is viewed as a double-edged sword. Its problems are reflected in two different understandings about: (i) how “effectiveness” is defined; (ii) what a good university student should be like. Both could be explained by the incompatible cultural dimension “masculinity-femininity” in Hofstede’s CDT, which is featured by task-versus-social orientation (Hofstede, 2001).

In the interview, Hong Kong students tended to strive for a work-life balance and place a slightly lower priority on their study, while the study is typically at the top priority for the mainland students. The debate of “what meaningful university life should be like” also reflects two cultural values. Hong Kong students, who adopted the person-oriented approach, were most often be satisfied in achieving a certain performance standard as they focus on the overall satisfaction with relationship and life (Forsyth, 2010). In contrast, mainland-students would strive for excellence and push themselves as much as possible.

A similar conflict is observed when students expressed their view about “being a deadline fighter”. The mainland students tended to emphasize “doing more in less time” by setting

goals and fitting them into the daily structured routine, while Hong Kong students focused on their own pace and suggested to work “smarter” rather than “harder”.

5. LIMITATIONS

Although the present study has yielded findings that have both practical and research implications, several limitations should be aware of.

First, only students who reported as having local or mainland friends were recruited in this study. Therefore, students who had extreme difficulties in making intercultural friends were left out in the inquiry. Further studies of their difficulties are needed in the future.

Second, all participants in this study were recruited from one university. So the sample could not represent the general populations of the mainland and Hong Kong students. The findings of this study could provide a more comprehensive basis for further discussion, yet they might not be fully transferable to cases in other institutions. To obtain more generalizable findings, more students should be recruited from a wider variety of universities.

Third, the findings focus on students’ perceptions at the friendship formation stage. However, previous literature suggested that the impact of different factors would vary across friendship stages (Chen, 2016; Sias et al, 2008). Some factors, such as the language difference, may be changed from negative to positive (or vice versa), which requires comprehensive exploration in the future.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study examined the perceived challenges of the mainland and local students in the intercultural friendship formation process.

Research question one aimed to examine students’ expectation of mainland-HK friendship.

This study found that the mainland students had higher expectations of other’s help, while they

were also more likely to take the initiative to help others. By contrast, Hong Kong students showed more concerns about the private boundary and vulnerability to others during the social interaction. These concerns made Hong Kong students more hesitant to take the initiative to approach others, even they observed that someone might need help.

Research question two and three were concerned about the students' perceived challenge of friendship formation, and how these might influence their intercultural relationship. The findings were categorized according to Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Model for more systematic analysis. At the intrapersonal level, the language difference and different concepts of friendship are reported as two main challenges. Although the language difference is not considered as a severe communication barrier, the language choice and learning motivation of Cantonese would affect whether their friendship with local peers could further develop or not, since they are considered by locals as a symbol of respecting local culture, as well as their willingness to integrate into the local community.

At the interpersonal level, both mainland and local students experienced difficulty in seeking a common topic. The findings revealed that it is difficult to build up intimacy only through common experiences or pop-culture (e.g. pop-music or movie), which often involved personal taste, aesthetic judgment or the lack of shared memories. Instead, those students with successful friendship tend to seek the common topic from task-oriented issues without much subjective judgment, such as their academic plan or how to discipline their own kids in the future.

At the institutional level, this study revealed that the students tend to attribute their successful experience with friendships to their personality, such as self-openness, in participating in school activities, rather than the university's initiatives.

At the socio-cultural level, the cultural difference was the second frequently reported challenges in mainland-HK friendship formation, while it works as a double-edged sword. On one hand, the students could explore and learn more from other cultures. On the other hand, this study showed that subtle cultural difference may also lead to significant intercultural conflicts. The cultural dimensions of mainland and Hong Kong students should be reviewed and reconsidered, since they are found to be far more individualistic than those reported in Hofstede's study.

This study revealed the perceived challenges of the mainland and local students at different levels. Of particular, it revealed how subtle cultural difference creates conflict between two sibling cultures. The findings could also contribute to the literature of intercultural communication, especially, how students, with strong cultural identity, view their relationship with local peers and the host community in their overseas study.

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Chapter 4: How intercultural friendships develop

This chapter is drafted in a standard manuscript format, entitled “Shifting focus and expectations: The perceived influential factors at different stages of the mainland-Hong Kong friendship”. It is pending to be submitted to the academic journal.

Article 3: Shifting focus and expectations: The perceived influential factors at different stages of the mainland-Hong Kong friendship

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Abstract

Previous studies about intercultural friendship have identified different kinds of influential factors in various contexts; however, most of these studies have been cross-sectional and few have considered its ever-changing nature and interaction at different stages.

Addressing this research gap, this study investigated the influential factors perceived by students at different friendship stages. Twenty-four mainland Chinese and Hong Kong university students were invited to join semi-structured interviews and share their experience.

The results revealed the value differences and seeking common topics were considered as two main concerns of students at all friendship stages. The propinquity was less recognized at the beginning, but it became vital at the advanced stage. By contrast, language differences played a more crucial role at the beginning, yet they faded away gradually at later stages. The study sheds light on implications to improve student support services at universities, as well as directions for future research.

Keywords

Intercultural communication; Intercultural friendship; friendship development; mainland-Hong Kong relationship; study abroad

1. INTRODUCTION

As universities internationalize, there has been growing interest in expanding the cultural diversity of students. In Hong Kong, for example, the number of international students has increased from 4,773 in 2005/06 to 18,060 in 2018/19, where 68.2% students are from Mainland China (University Grants Committee, 2019). Mainland students have already become a significant and indispensable population group on university campuses. However, although mainland and Hong Kong students shared the same Confucian heritage and writing system (Ma, 2015), friendship formation between them is frequently reported as challenging.

Previous researchers have paid little attention to intercultural friendships despite its importance as universities become increasingly multi-cultural; rather, most studies have focused on differences between cultural groups through: 1) identifying influential factors at the individual or contextual level (Masgoret & Ward, 2006); 2) by verifying different communication and psychological theories in different contexts (Lee, 2008; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2003); or 3) examining the effectiveness of external support or intervention programmes run by the institution (Arkoudis, Watty et al., 2013). Most of the literature, however, seems to inform understanding of cultural differences only, instead of fully considering the dynamic nature of friendship development.

The present study, thus, sets out to understand how different factors apply to friendship development in the context in Hong Kong (HK). Most studies set in Hong Kong have viewed non-local people as a “vulnerable population” (Sherry et al, 2010), yet mainland China has the overriding power in Hong Kong, regardless of its social status, political power and cultural

prestige. Although mainlanders are technically a minority in Hong Kong, they should not be considered to be a vulnerable group; thus the power imbalance between the host and guest may make the mainland-HK relationship complex.

To explore the nature of mainland-HK friendship development, this study investigates which factor(s) are perceived as important at different friendship stages. Also, this study explores how an individual interprets subjective experiences, and how their perception and behaviour are shaped in different cultures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Friendship and intercultural friendship

In developmental psychology, friendship is described as a “voluntary and symmetrical peer-relationship.” Its voluntary and spontaneous natures distinguish it from other compulsory and asymmetrical relationships (e.g., parent-child or supervisor-subordinate) (Beer, 2001). It is not driven by sexual attraction or by a sense of duty, such as in romantic or supervisor-subordinate relationships. It is also different from the Chinese concept, “*guanxi*,” which encompasses instrumental and sentimental elements (Ruan, 2016).

The discussion of friendship growth often involves individual choice on the basis of “similarity.” Researchers have suggested that people are more likely to make friends with those who shared some similarity, such as mutual liking (Callan et al., 1991; Cooper, 1980), background and culture (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001), and subjective viewpoints or commonality for musical taste and opinions (McPherson et al, 2001). Mutual similarity contributes not only to initial attraction between each other, but also to the formation of close friendship bonds (McPherson et al, 2001).

Compared with intracultural friendships, intercultural friendships are far more complicated as they are characterized by individual differences between cultural background, values, and

spoken languages (Lee, 2006). Individuals have to manage the differences in cultural values and languages and overcome enduring stereotypes. At the same time, they have to find, or build up commonality between each other.

Although the formation of intercultural friendships is challenging, it is particularly important for non-local students as it provides them with social and psychological support. It can help them adapt to the host-culture and ease the acculturation stress in unfamiliar environments (Yeh & Inose, 2003). For local students, it can also develop their intercultural competence and prepare them for internationalization (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

2.2 Contributing factors of intercultural friendship development

The literature provides various models of intercultural friendship development identifying various personal and contextual factors as responsible for friendship development or deterioration.

Personal factors include personal competence, attitudes or beliefs, such as host-language proficiency (Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Mori, 2000), intercultural willingness to communicate (Kassing, 1997; Mertins & Baus, 2010), openness to other cultures (Williams & Johnson, 2011), perceived intergroup threats and intercultural anxiety (Ward et al., 2009) and perceived similarities with respect to attitudes, values, and interests (Sias et al., 2008). Some attributes are inborn, but they are also shaped by previous life experiences.

Contextual factors include external influences which affect friendship development, such as the domicile proximity and propinquity (Yefanova, Baird, & Montgomery, 2015; Yu & Zhang, 2016) and workplace setting (Kudo, 2019). They do not directly affect individual communication but allow individuals to maintain relationships with minimum effort or time-cost.

In previous studies, the above factors were often used to map different intercultural relationships (Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Sias, 2008); however, it is generally agreed that there is no single factor or solution for developing intercultural friendships.

2.3 Theories about intercultural friendship development

Concerning various key variables, some researchers have proposed different theories of sociopsychology or interpersonal communication to explore the complexity of intercultural friendships.

Emerson's Social-Exchange Theory (SET), for example, offers an economic view to explain friendship development. Emerson suggested that people tend to choose and develop relationships with the maximum benefit and minimum cost of maintenance (Emerson, 1976). In other words, the satisfaction level of a relationship is the result of balancing expected rewards with costs (Emerson, 1976; McGraw et al., 2003).

Adopting a socio-cognitive approach, Tajfel (1981) proposed Social-Identity Theory (SIT) to explain individuals' social behaviour. SIT suggests individuals achieve their own social identity and establish positively valued distinctiveness for their corresponding cultural group. It is believed that such subjective cognition predicts the response and behaviour in intercultural communication. SIT serves as the theoretical basis of various acculturation theories, such as the Bidimensional Acculturation Model (Berry, 1997) and Identity Management Theory (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). SIT is frequently adopted to explain how cultural identities are negotiated in the process of sociocultural adaptation and interpersonal relationship development.

At the individual level, the socio-psychological focus can predict successful intercultural communication. Allport's Intergroup contact theory (ICT), for example, focuses on the external environment and suggests that increasing intercultural contact is a way to increase

mutual understanding, reduce uncertainty and diminish prejudice and bias (Allport, 1954; Binder et al., 2009). Frequency of contact is thus regarded as a predictor of successful intergroup interaction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; West & Turner, 2010). It is often linked with Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (AUMT), which focuses on how individuals effectively communicate based on their individual attributes (anxiety and uncertainty) in social situations (Gudykunst, 2005).

At the socio-cultural level, researchers in comparative cultural studies have adopted the Cultural-Distance Theory, which suggests that those who are from countries with a relatively homogeneous culture or a cultural distance distant from the host-country encounter more challenges in socio-cultural adaptation (Broome et al, 1996). Following this approach, Hofstede further developed the well-known Cultural-Dimension Theory (CDT), which provides a multidimensional national culture framework for the country comparison worldwide.

Although CDT has been widely adopted, having less cultural-distance does not mean having difficulties. For example, perhaps the most famous psychologist, Sigmund Freud, suggested people from similar cultural groups are more sensitive to subtle differences, or even express strong aversion or hatred towards each other (Freud, 1930). He described it as the “narcissism of minor differences,” which is evident in the great tension between British and Scottish, or Spaniards and Portuguese.

2.4 The research gap

Very few studies have questioned the CDT's assumption about cultural-distance; however, the recent growing tension between mainland and HK people, who share a highly similar cultural heritage, shows that cultural-distance may not be sufficient to predict or explain the challenges of intercultural relationship development. Therefore, this study explores the role of the context,

especially how individuals interact with each other in the complicated context of growing intergroup tension.

On the other hands, most friendship studies in the field have focused on mapping various factors leading to successful friendships. They have assumed that individual concern about friendship development would remain the same across different stages; however, they have failed to capture the dynamic change of intercultural relationship (Kudo, 2019). Indeed, friendships are not static but are always evolving and show different natures; some studies have revealed that the impact of different factors or demographic variables varies at different stages. For example, Chen & Nakazawa's study (2012) reported that both gender and culture play a more influential role at the beginning stage of friendship, but fade at later stages. Also, language differences were also found to play different roles. They can serve as a communication barrier at the beginning stage, but become a source of "humour and play" for strengthening friendships at the advanced level (Sias, 2008). Regarding mainland-HK friendships, it is still unclear whether and how some factors have more (or less) influence than others at certain friendship stages.

Addressing the above concerns, the following questions were proposed to guide this study:

RQ1. What are the key influential factors as perceived by mainland and Hong Kong students at different friendship stages?

RQ2: How do perceived influential factors contribute to (or detract from) intercultural friendships at different stages?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study investigates students' perceptions of the friendship development process, which typically involves the subjective interpretation of peers and the environment during the interaction. After careful consideration, a mixed-method exploratory study was chosen.

Mixed methods provide multiple databases for “methodological triangulation.” On the one hand, quantitative data offers a general view of clusters by presenting the magnitude of frequency and describing trends in a large population. On the other hand, the qualitative interviews play an explanatory role offsetting the limitations of surveys (Creswell, 2009). Interviews allow researchers to explore participants' subjective interpretations about the environment, especially how they make meaning of other's behaviour (Verma, 1999); they also explore the accumulated impact of different variables on their friendship as a whole (Yin, 2003).

Second, quantitative data offers a clear boundary of different cases (i.e., gender, nationality or current friendship stage), which allows the researcher to compare and contrast data from systematic categories (De Vaus, 2001; Merriam, 1998) and conduct intensive analysis, which addresses similar thoughts or behavioural patterns of similar participants with an open-minded attitude (Haupt, 2001).

However, it is worth noting that this study does not aim to reflect absolute truths or common patterns which can apply to all students. Instead, it only reflects subjective truths about how participants interpret their surroundings and give meaning during the intercultural interaction. In other words, the research findings can only indicate the possibility of intercultural friendship, rather than determining a universal pattern or solution.

3.2 Sampling and criteria

In the quantitative phase, one hundred and fifty nine university students from a medium-sized Hong Kong university were invited to participate in a survey on the subject of perceived influential factors in their mainland-HK friendships. Then, twenty-four university students (twelve mainland and twelve local students) were randomly invited to share their experiences in semi-structured interviews. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to complete in a one-to-one setting, which allowed both the researcher and participant to focus on the targeted issue and freely express their attitudes, thoughts and experience at the same time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

All participants in this study were required to fulfill the following criteria: (a) being enrolled in a Full-time Undergraduate or Postgraduate programme; (b) reporting as having an intercultural friendship, knowing each other for at least one year; and (c) having only a friendship (not a romantic relationship); and (d) being a newly-arrival student in Hong Kong (Mainland students only and never having lived in Hong Kong before the current study programme).

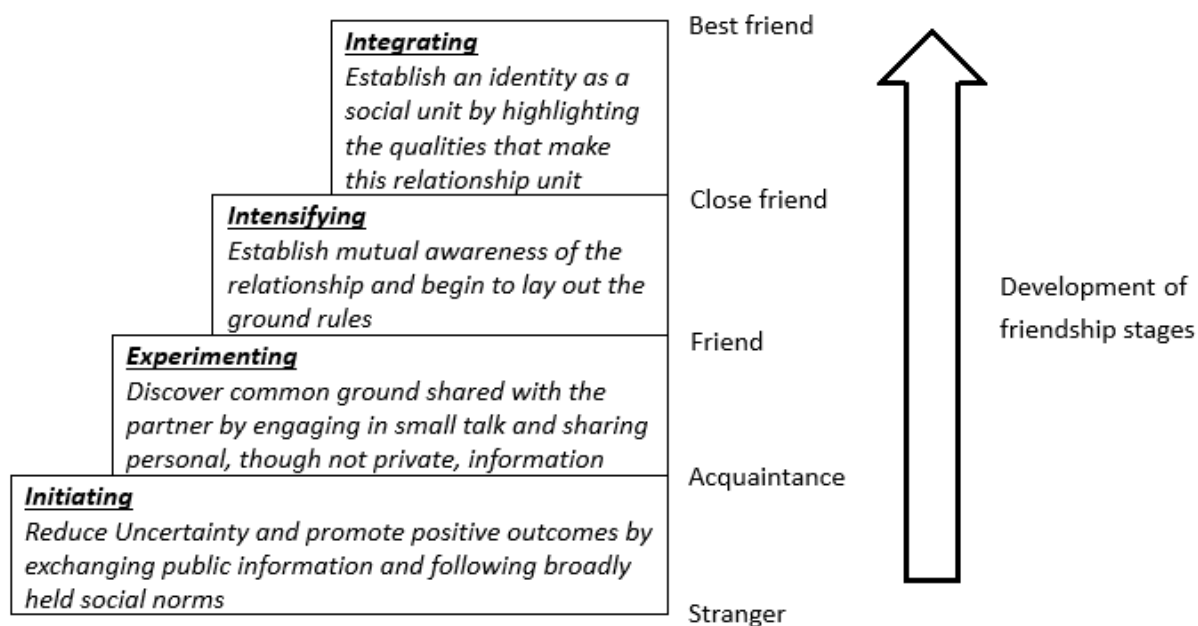
3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Quantitative Survey

The quantitative survey (see Section 9.3) aimed to provide a portrait of the general pattern of intercultural friendship development. After sharing their demographic data, all participants selected the statement (adopted from Knapp's Relational Stage Model) which best fit their current relationship. Knapp's Model is one of the most widely adopted models for identifying friendship stages (Chen, 2016; Peng, 2011). It classifies friendship into four stages (initiating, experimenting, intensify and integrating) (Figure 1) with detailed descriptors for the cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Avtgis et al, 1998; Webb & Thompson-Hayes, 2002).

Figure 1

Knapp and Vangelisti's Relational Stage Model (Knapp et al, 2014, p.240)



Knapp's model is based on Social-Penetration Theory (SPT), which focuses on the degree of intimacy that guides topic discussions. SPT uses the "onion" metaphor to describe the degree of disclosure of public self (outside layer) and personal selves (core) at different relationship stages (Taylor & Altman, 1987). "Self-disclosure" is highlighted as an indicator of friendship stages in two dimensions: (i) Breadth of self-disclosure and (ii) Depth of self-disclosure (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009).

Third, the students were invited to recall a memory of their best friend in the mainland-HK friendship, and propose the influential factors that they believed contributed to their friendship development. To facilitate students' memory recall, a probe sheet (including 14 categories of influential factors) was provided. The probe sheet was adopted from Chen's study (2016) about mainland-Taiwanese friendships with some modifications. For example, some similar items, such as "tolerance and open-minded" and "accept differences" were collapsed, while some

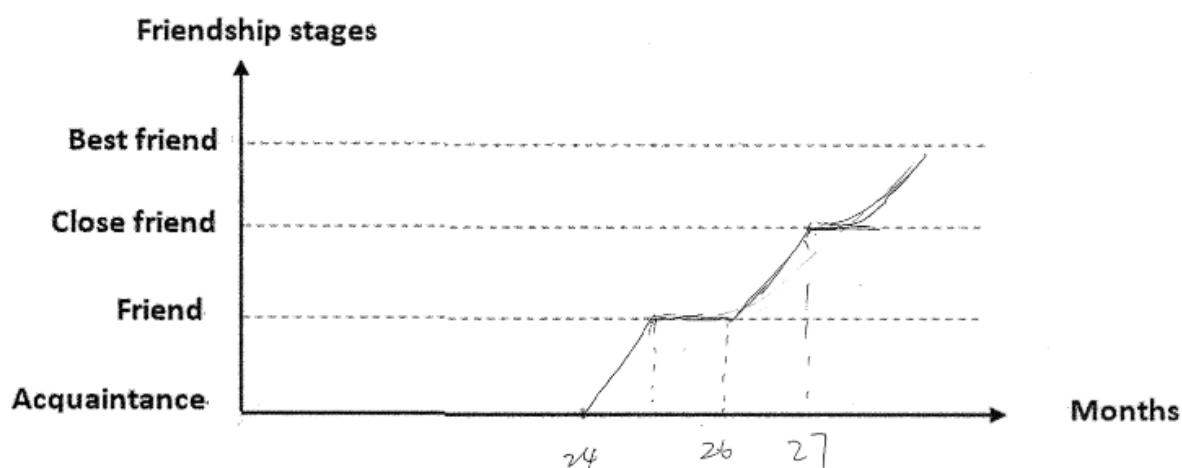
inappropriate items for Hong Kong, such as “avoid speaking Fukien during communication,” were deleted.

3.3.2 *Semi-structured interview*

In the semi-structured interviews (see Section 9.4), students were asked to describe their experience of friendship development and their impressive memories during the intercultural interaction. Here, Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT) was applied to trigger memories, and interpret the moments at which their relationships were significantly changed (either positively or negatively). An example of RIT graph is attached below:

Figure 2

An example of RIT graph from interviewee (ML-D-01)



First, the participant would be invited to identify the times at which their friendship changed by plotting these points on a graph. The X-axis represented time (starting from knowing each other to the time of the interview), and the Y-axis reflected different friendship stages (initiating, experimenting, intensifying and integrating). After each point was plotted, the participant was asked (i) to map the most important factors (as suggested in the self-reported phase) to shift friendship stages, and explain the reason for their choice; (ii) to share what

particular events were associated with this change, and how the quality and quantity of intercultural communication changed.

3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data was illustrated by a frequency and percentage bar-chart. The reported percentage of each item was calculated separately for mainland and local groups and given an average percentage at each stage. The items reported for the first three highest percentages at each stage was extracted to plot a graph to see if any pattern would emerge.

The interview data adopted a constant comparison approach, which is generally considered effective for organizing the interview transcripts into meaningful themes (Creswell, 2009). Constant comparison is a process of generating conceptual images and then shaping and reshaping according to ongoing observations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this approach, the data collection and analysis are not an independent phase, but a continuous cycle.

The interview data was continuously compared with the initial categories and new categories were created when the data could not be coded into any of the existing ones (Gasson, 2009). For example, one mainland student's comment, "local's squander most money on travelling," was compared against existing codes, such as "incompatible working style" or "incompatible socio-political view" first to ensure that it could not be put under any code before creating a new one. In this case, a new one, "value of money," under the sub-theme "cultural/value difference" was created.

This study underwent three levels of coding (open, axial and selective coding) from the most descriptive to the most interpretative level (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, "squandering budget on travelling," "value of money" and "cultural/value difference" were extracted and served as sub-themes for the qualitative analysis.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Perceived influential factors at different friendship stages

In the survey, the open question “What are the factors that contributed to your mainland-HK friendship according to your experience?” explored the perceived influential factors of individuals. Four hundred and seventy-nine items were given by one hundred and fifty nine students, with each student reporting 3.01 factors on average. The results were coded into nine categories.

Figure 3-1, 3-2 and 3-3 show the distribution percentage of the main influential factors as perceived by students at different stages.

Figure 3-1

Perceived influential factors at different stages (Overall, N=159)

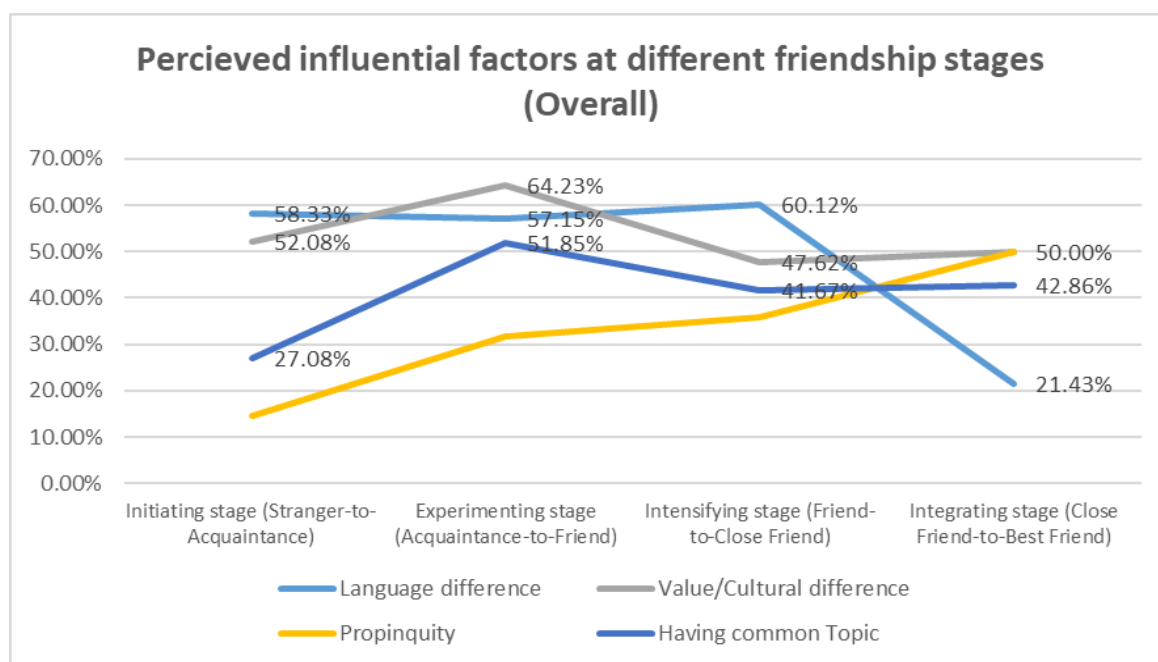
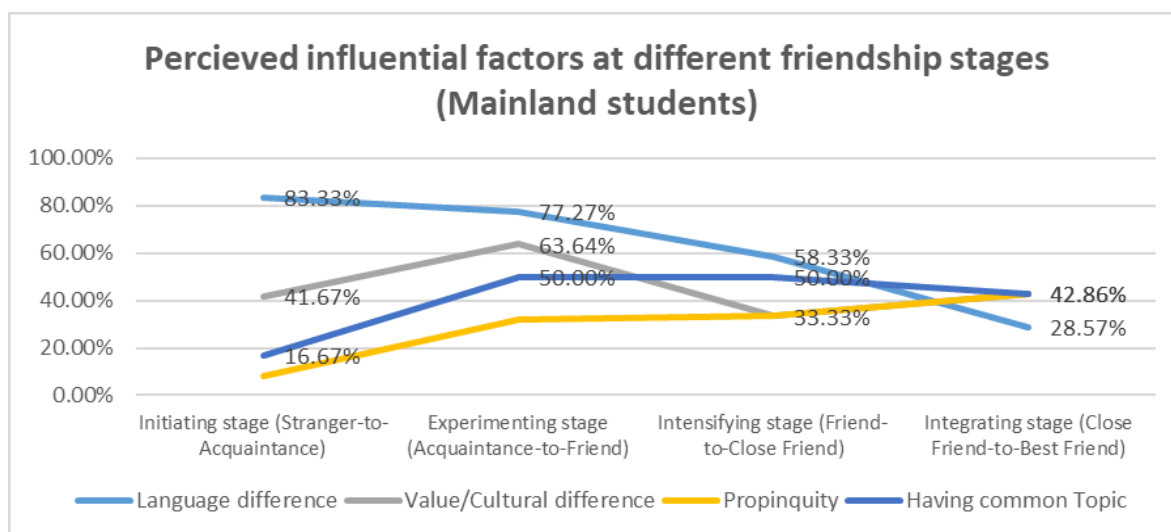
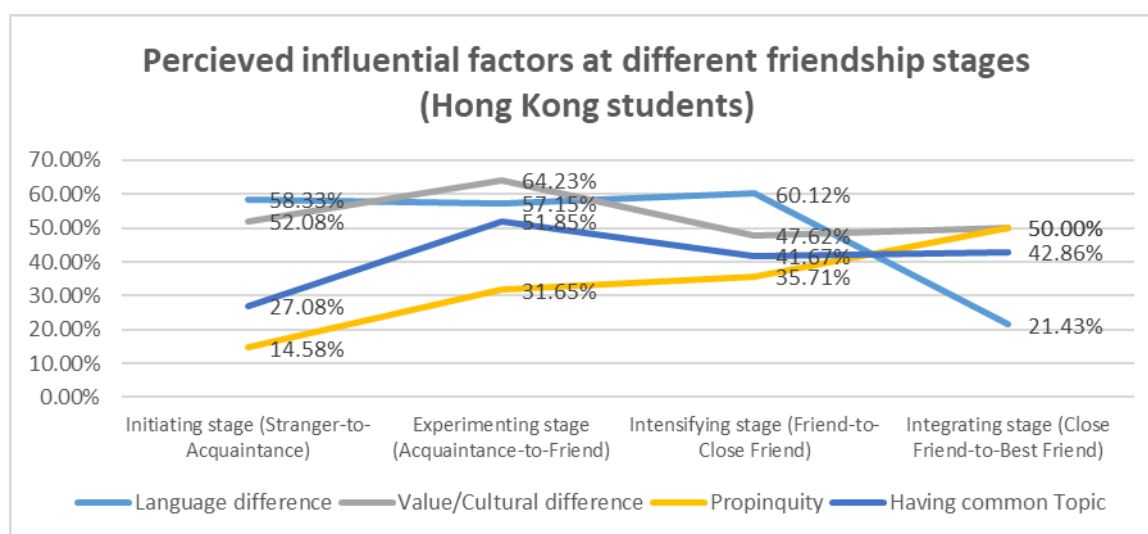


Figure 3-2

Perceived influential factors at different stages (Mainland students, N=53)

**Figure 3-3**

Perceived influential factors at different stages (local students, N=106)



Overall, the main feature to note is that roughly half of the students, ranging from 47.6% to 64.2%, considered “cultural/value difference” as the key factor of friendship development, followed by “having a common topic,” which reached its peak (51.9%) at the initial stage and levelled off afterwards.

The significant difference between basic and advanced friendship was found in the percentage change of propinquity and language-difference. In figure 3-1, the percentage of propinquity

shows a substantial proportional increase, from 14.6% in the initial stage to 50% in the integrating stage. By contrast, the importance of language difference was recognized more in the first stages, but it experienced a dramatic drop from 60.1% to 21.4% at the integrating stage.

Language difference was the main difference between mainland and Hong Kong students, where language difference was more influential for mainland students at the beginning (83.3%), but fell gradually and was overtaken by “propinquity” at the later friendship stage, which then remained constant at 57% to 60% in the first three stages among Hong Kong students.

4.2 Influential factors of mainland-HK friendship at different stages

In the survey, language and cultural differences and the difficulties of seeking common topic were reported by students as the three main influential factors; however, their importance varied considerably across different friendship stages according to the interview responses.

4.2.1 Language difference

As the communication barrier. During the first two stages, the language barrier was perceived by mainland students even before starting the semester. Student’s dissatisfaction with the social interaction in the orientation-camp (O-camp), for example, was reported:

I was completely confused in the 2-day O-camp, and had no idea about what they were talking about. At that time, even English made me feel warm” (ML-A-02)

All people (in the O-camp) spoke Cantonese. I was so lonely in the middle of a crowd, especially when everyone enjoyed the atmosphere (ML-B-03)

My Cantonese was so poor, and she [the new local friend] was also embarrassed to pretend to understand what I said. Finally, she suggested me to shift back to

Putonghua (ML-B-05)

The negative experience further contributed to L2 anxiety and made students hesitate to participate in local students' activities afterwards. As one student noted:

When I was invited to local activities, I would first ask if they can speak Putonghua. If yes, then I would go. If English, I would hesitate, but still attend. If all Cantonese, I would surely not join” (ML-B-03)

Different from intercultural studies conducted in English-speaking countries, it is worth-noting that the language-barrier only happened when the student spoke Cantonese. Indeed, most Hong Kong students can speak Putonghua, and are willing to accommodate mainland students if they have difficulty in speaking Cantonese (Leung & Yu, 2019).

In contrast, if local students do not have enough confidence or interest in speaking Putonghua, they may be considered as lacking respect:

One time the lecturer assigned us into different local groups in the classroom discussion. Two local students asked immediately “Could we group together?” It was an embarrassing and angry moment. We all thought that they were rude and disrespectful to us [Mainlanders]... I know they may not speak Putonghua well, but the classroom atmosphere was already spoiled. (ML-B-03)

They keep talking in fast Cantonese and did not care about me. It is not a problem of language, but lacking respect and consideration for others (ML-C-04)

As an identity marker. Although at the advanced friendship stage, language difference was less perceived as a communication barrier, it was still a salient factor in the development of mainland-HK friendship in various ways. First, language is considered a social and cultural marker of identity (Jaspal, 2009).

Some mainland tourists have some... inappropriate behavior which eroded the perception of others towards all mainlanders... When I speak Putonghua in the Metro, I feel uncomfortable and it seems that others are watching me (ML-A-01)

When I first came in 2014, the student's strike started on the first month, which really gave us a negative image. All mainland students in my cohort do not have any sense of belonging towards HK. That's why I have not learnt Cantonese as I am not sure whether I will be welcomed... They dislike us simply because of our mother-tongue or identity, which I could not choose. I am really upset (ML-A-03)

The above sharing shows that, speaking Putonghua made mainland students feel uncomfortable and inferior when there was a growing conflict between the mainland and Hong Kong in the surrounding environment. Addressing this anxiety, some students changed to speak English, which is generally considered as having a superior language in Hong Kong society (Evan, 2009; Li, 2010). However, the atmosphere would become unnatural as most undergraduate students are not used to speaking English in class. In contrast, it is much more acceptable to use a lingua franca at the postgraduate level (ML-C-03), or between English major students. (HK-A-01).

Second, the language choice was linked with the preferred cultural identity of individuals:

Hong Kong is a port of China, and Putonghua is a compulsory subject in primary schools. Their Putonghua proficiency should reach a certain standard. (ML-A-01)

Some local people do not want to speak Putonghua. It is not about their ability, but their willingness. "Why should I speak Putonghua? Why don't you put more effort to assimilate yourself into Hong Kong?" (ML-B-01)

Some Hong Kong students also shared similar thoughts that link language-choice with the preferred cultural identity.

You know that we do not speak Putonghua well, but you keep using it. Do you want to create a communication barrier? Or do you think your language is more prestigious than ours? (HK-A-01)

The above excerpts show that the language choice often leads to a sensitive question “which standardized language should be dominant,” while incompatible expectations may sometimes develop into misunderstandings. Here, the mainland student believed that all Hong Kong students should be able to speak Putonghua as they have learnt it since primary schools. Their refusal to use it appears to reflect a refusal that Hong Kong is part of China. To Hong Kong students, they may think that mainland students intentionally refuse to speak Cantonese, which is disrespectful of Cantonese and Hong Kong culture.

By contrast, the perceived willingness to speak or learn other languages was positively perceived by students:

If you speak Cantonese, the Hong Kong people think “Wow, you want to understand our language and integrate into Hong Kong culture.” Similarly, it brings a positive impression to me if my Hong Kong friend speaks Putonghua well (ML-C-03)

She is keen on learning Cantonese... She would not think mainland Chinese are the best and nothing is worth learning from Hong Kong (HK-C-01)

4.2.2 Cultural/value Difference

Incompatible social norms and working style. In general, students at the initiating stage were more sensitive to the incompatible social norms or living customs. For example:

When I returned to my hostel, I met a mainlander when the lift door opened. I waited for a few seconds, but she didn't move. Then I moved forward and expected her to step backwards a bit, but she still didn't move. Suddenly, she rushed out and

almost knocked me down (HK-A-01)

When I first came and got on the minibus, I told the driver I'd like to go the EdUHK.

Indeed, it is the final stop and need not say so. At that time, other people were looking at me. In fact, I don't want to take initiative to ask "why are you watching me?" It makes me look stupid (ML-C-02).

Incompatible social norms may create an embarrassing experience. Fortunately, it can be gradually reduced over time after the student gains more living experience. In contrast, conflicts due to incompatible beliefs or value conflicts are more difficult to be resolved.

Incompatible belief and value conflicts. In this study, incompatible beliefs and value conflicts between students were reflected in their views about money and studying.

They [] spend most of their time on their part-time job and work hard to save money. However, they spend huge amounts of money on overseas travel (ML-A-01)

Local students spend more time on activities. They work for the student union overnight. I could not understand how they are so concentrated on non-academic tasks (ML-B-03)

Incompatible working styles were also reported by students in the interview when they worked on joint projects:

Maintaining harmony is important to me. I always think about if I will make others unhappy before I do anything. In contrast, she [] is always task-oriented and said that no one will blame her as she never takes anything personally (HK-C-01)

They may make the registration if they thought that they could get a high score.

Personal interests are not their main concern (HK-B-01)

The local students did not feel comfortable about the extremely task oriented and

instrumental approach of their mainland-peers. Instead, they tried to strike a balance between the task-oriented and people-oriented approaches in their study and extra-curricular activities.

Incompatible socio-political concepts and worldview. At the advanced friendship stage, more value differences were explored during intercultural interactions, while some of them developed into conflicting views on certain issues or policies.

Its [] effectiveness is so low. It may spend more than 10 years to build a metro or a new town...the mainland is more autocratic, but it can build many things within one or two years. Also, the government does not only suppress you, but gives you an irresistible offer (ML-C-03)

Effectiveness is important, but not the most important concern. The procedural justice and right of private property are more pivotal than others... You could not force others to sacrifice themselves in the name of “effectiveness” or “majority interest” (HK-C-02)

Conflicting views between mainland and Hong Kong students originated from a core-question: “Should economic development be prioritized over other matters”? Since it is a question of value judgment between the effectiveness and procedural justice, it cannot be resolved easily and thus both groups of students tended to avoid these sensitive topics.

Self-Identity: HongKonger or part of China? The third kind of value-difference was related to identity, which is often reflected when students were in conversations with non-Chinese foreigners.

The school principal asked us where we come from. Some Hong Kong students replied that “they are from Hong Kong.” It seems to imply that Hong Kong is not China, or is separated from China. I am so uncomfortable that it seems to be a claim of independence (ML-C-03)

Once she told a friend “I feel so disgusted. Just now someone asked me where I come from, and I quickly reply that I am from China”Indeed, almost all local student thought that they are Hong Kong people, though they admitted that Hong Kong belongs to China. It makes me feel unhappy and realize that she has never thought that we were the same (ML-C-04)

The key point of this identity conflict is whether “HongKonger” is an acceptable identity. In the view of Mainland students, it is completely unacceptable and would be interpreted as a claim of independence. In contrast, Hong Kong students were not aware of how this claim is problematic. Instead, Hong Kong people feel uncomfortable when they Mainland friends declare themselves patriotic:

How many intellectuals were killed in the Cultural Revolution? And how many innocent people were starved to death? Millions of people lost their lives after 1949, and what should we celebrate for? You keep saying how powerful you are, or how rich you are. Their propaganda brings us nothing but fear (HK-C-02)

Moreover, behaving like a Chinese appeared to be stressful for Hong Kong students, especially when they were asked “are you still entitled to be a Chinese”?, and being evaluated for whether they expressed certain patriotic attitudes or support for the government. As mentioned by HK-C-02, for example, “the nation, the government and the political party” means the same thing in China, yet they are viewed separately in Hong Kong. In other words, Hong Kong students may criticize the government, but still claim to be patriotic, whereas it is unimaginable to mainland students.

Different understandings about the socio-political issues. The interviews also showed that socio-political issues were sensitive topics, which often had a negative impact on mainland-HK friendships:

She has many misunderstandings about China, whereas she only visited the mainland once. Most of her understanding is built on the second-hand information from others...She does not quite agree with the Communist party or Tiananmen event. She always thinks that there is no freedom in China, and the government does not admit what it had done (ML-C-03)

They will not talk about anything in front of me, but would use “potent country” to describe us and our country... Indeed, they know nothing about us. Perhaps they just want to please other local friends and show the same values (ML-D-02)

Mainland students with advanced local friendships acknowledged that these are just general comments and are nothing personal to anyone. Yet other mainland students may take criticism of the mainland personally and perceive it as “discrimination.” Also, in the mainland students’ view, the local’s judgments or comments only reflected their lack of understanding about China and their pro-western views. This mindset extended to their conflicting views about the cause of recent social unrest in Hong Kong:

The legislation system in HK is problematic. How could it allow that all judges are recruited from foreign countries? The police work hard, but they keep releasing suspects... Riots will never stop as the financial supporters from the US want to continue the violence You see how many places were destroyed in the name of promoting freedom and human rights? (ML-B-03)

I am not surprised about her thought. It is probably because of their education, which does not encourage critical thinking or expressing different views from the majority (HK-A-01)

They assumed that the police are right all the time. But indeed, the police have a shameless propensity for their selective 'enforcement. If all judges were recruited

from mainland China and all of them “cooperated” with the police, I could not imagine how bad Hong Kong will become (HK-C-02)

From the above, it is clear that both sides have very different views about the key to conflict resolution. They carry opposite views about the police, judges, as well as the role of foreign parties. It is interesting to see that both sides think that the opposite view is the result of being brainwashed by the biased media and propaganda.

4.2.3 Seeking common topics

Exploring similarities at the initial stage. Different from the language and value differences, seeking common topics was not prioritized in the beginning. One of the possibilities is that the social need of self-disclosure at the initial stage focuses on the exchange of demographic information only (Avtgis et al, 1998). The interviews showed that the students tried to seek commonality from their backgrounds or previous experience:

I don’t know their past, so we could only talk about the learning problem. For example, most of them have part-time jobs and always talked about it. I could not get a word in edgewise (ML-A-01)

I could talk about any trivial or scandalous things with other mainland friends, whereas Hong Kong people know nothing (HK-B-01)

In the mainland, we would talk about our parent’s career and see if we have any common background. However, most Hong Kong students are hesitant to talk about it. Instead, they are more likely to share their individual experience in studying or personal interests (ML-B-03)

Sharing common experience is a natural way to develop intra-cultural friendships (Wright & Schartner, 2013), whereas the findings show that it did not work well because it spoiled the conversational atmosphere and highlighted cultural differences.

In the experimenting stage (friend-to-close friend), the students still strived to seek commonality, but focused on their common interests (e.g., sports and music) (ML-B-03; ML-B-04; HK-D-02); common concerns (e.g., romantic relationships (ML-D-01), family background and parent's expectations (ML-B-02; HK-D-01). The information exchange was also considered as a way to show personal strengths.

I am a secondary school teacher. It would be best if my friend is from the education field as well. We could have common topics and improve together (ML-B-03)

All of us have different strengths, and you should join the local activities accordingly. If you make a wrong choice, they would look down on you and it would be impossible to make friends there. You have to show your strength so that others would not approach you aggressively (ML-B-04)

Exploring differences at the advanced stage. As opposed to the first two stages, the students at the development stage showed more confidence in finding common topics to discuss. Also, they tried to explore more topics with less commonality, such as revealing their personal weaknesses and seeking help from each other:

Every friend could find the common topics at every stage. At the initial stage, for example, you could share about how you view current or future challenges in your own situation. Don't talk about your childhood, your personal interests, favorite movie or pop-star. It is too hard for you to find common ground (ML-C-04)

We often talked about our studies or assignments. I also wanted to share about how we could better prepare for the upcoming 10-week exchange programme. I have so many weaknesses and she could always give me valuable advice (HK-C-01)

She did not understand what the lecturer expected. And I shared my experience and previous assignment with her. It was very impressive and marked a new stage of

our friendship (ML-C-03)

Furthermore, the students would take risks to show their real thoughts about some sensitive topics:

To me, the sharing of different political viewpoints marked a new stage of our friendship. We could play and laugh together, but it is difficult to know what they really thought about the sensitive social issues (ML-C-02)

We have conflicting views about cultural identity, but we never force ourselves to reach a consensus. Most often, we will say “Oh, we have different views here” and shift the topic to other areas (ML-C-03)

Different from the beginning stages, students with more advanced friendship were more confident in managing conflicts when cultural differences were found in the conversation. In contrast, considerable number of students (N=8, 33.3%) at the beginning stage were worried that the sensitive topic may led to unresolvable conflict (ML-A-02; ML-A-03; ML-B-02; ML-B-04), or risked the friendship (ML-C-01; HK-C-01; HK-C-02; ML-C-04).

4.2.4 Increasing awareness of propinquity

In this study, propinquity was reported less as an influential factor at the initiating stage (14.6%), while it gradually increased across the friendship stages and became a pivotal factor at the integrating stage (50%). This seems to be different from the traditional point of view that individuals grow to like people whom they encounter or interact with on a regular basis at the beginning stage (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). It is probably because superficial conversations started from random interactions in the dormitories, student-orientation activities or other informal parties which may have saturated the need for building initial contacts.

However, the interviews showed that close friendships could only be developed in activities or tasks that involved high amount of contact and shared certain commonality, such as having a

common interest (e.g. student activities), common goal (e.g., sports teams or hostel management committee) or common challenges (e.g., overseas programme, teaching practice or part-time work), while these activities may come to the end, especially they get closer to their graduation. It would shift students' attention on how to maintain the current friendship afterwards. The importance of propinquity is thus more recognized by students at advanced friendship stages.

The interviews showed that propinquity plays two crucial roles in friendship development. First, it offers an opportunity to increase mutual understanding and uncover personal strengths of each other during interactions.

During internship, we worked together in the same room all the time. Data input is so boring, so we often chatted with each other. Sometimes we would have the lunch after office hours (ML-D-01)

I think that having common experience is important for all stages. Not only could it help to build up rapport, it could also help us to see other's personality, such as how they deal with stress (HK-D-02)

Unlike Chen's intercultural study (2016), this study showed that the shared activities did not require participants to elicit "meaningful exchange of cultural information." Instead, they are already helpful for friendship development if they encourage conversation to explore similarities and differences, and let students work together toward a shared goal.

Shared activities can build up the relational identities or a sense of "similarity," especially for students with shared goals and an institutional impetus for extended contact. This was best represented by students in the same overseas programme:

When we were in the same foreign country, we would naturally want to be together with co-national peers and feel that "we are all Chinese," but we will be separated

from each other in Hong Kong (HK-D-01)

In Australia, we all spoke Cantonese and faced any challenges as a unit or group...

None of us is a host or guest, and we could talk freely with each other (ML-C-02)

The above sharing shows that cultural similarity / difference is not an absolute, but a relative concept, where students develop a new inclusive identity of “non-Australian” in the overseas context. Some students (ML-B-03; HK-D-03) further reported that their online activities, such as playing the same mobile collaborative game, performed a similar function and built up a sense of relational identity in the digital world.

5. CONCLUSION

Compared with previous studies, this study took a more comprehensive view and examined the influential patterns of relationship evolution from acquaintances to best friends. Some significant trends have emerged: (i) From seeking similarity to exploring differences; (ii) From showing a desirable image to vulnerable self; and (iii) From multicultural identity to melting pot, all explained below:

5.1 Initial stage (Acquaintance-to-friend): Could we be friends?

The initial stage incorporates the processes enacted when the students first came together. Student would scan each other to determine whether they should initiate further communication. In other words, this stage is a preliminary audition for a closer friendship. In this study, most student’s sharing was focused on the same question, “Could we become closer?”. This finding is consistent with the similarity-attraction hypothesis, which suggests that individuals prefer to interact with others who are similar to themselves (Bochner, 2003).

Unlike Knapp’s suggestion, the role of stereotypes and prior knowledge of the other’s culture do not play a key role. Instead, the students evaluated the potential of friendship via three ways:

First, the student would focus on language differences as they are the most intuitive thing to evaluate whether effective communication is possible. Similar to previous intercultural studies, language differences are perceived as a major communication barrier, where mainland students lacked confidence in speaking Cantonese and isolated themselves from participating in other local events (ML-B-03).

Second, the students explored cultural differences at this stage as they served as a filter for potential relationships. For example, cultural differences in social norms or diet-preference were used to predict possible challenges in daily interactions. These could be explained by the AUMT, where the friendship-pairs with high value-similarity did not need to get rid of uncertainty and engage in a process of adapting to and converging different cultural values and identities (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). Moreover, they may reduce the cost of knowing each other (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007).

5.2 Experimenting stage: How similar we are?

Similar to the initiating stage, this stage is also an audition for future friendship. The interaction at this stage was more frequent and regular, which allowed students to explore more about each other, such as if they have any common ground or integrating topic for penetrating conversation. Instead of filtering the potential relationship, the students started to focus on their values, beliefs, worldview and the origin of incompatible thought between each other (Osbeck & Moghaddam, 1997). For example, cultural differences were reported regarding views about money (ML-B-01), work-life balance (HK-B-01; ML-B-01; ML-B-03), emotional expression (HK-C-01) and the living schedules (HK-B-03). A few students also found interesting cultural elements (e.g., special customs or traditions in Hong Kong) (ML-B-03) to see if they could draw individuals together.

Consistent with the AUMT, the awareness of value differences helped students prepare for possible cultural differences, which led to better expectations of what problems they might face during interaction in the future (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Parker & Seal, 1996).

5.3 Intensifying stage: What differences we have, and can we grow together?

The interviews showed that the intensifying stage is a tipping point of friendship development. The initial probes toward intensification of intimacy are often exercised with more caution regarding cultural differences, rather than identifying similarities. In terms of common topics, the students shared some previously withheld content, such as personal frustrations, failures, imperfections, and views about sensitive issues. The change of self-disclosure topics indicated that students' focuses had shifted from "achieving more similarity" to "exploring the differences," which began to include some private information, personal weaknesses, and even testing the sensitive bottom line of others (HK-C-01; HK-C-02; ML-C-02; ML-D-01).

In addition, language is not simply a communication barrier, but also serves as a window to observe value-difference between each other at this stage. For example, a Hong Kong student (HK-C-02) reported that democracy enjoys a relatively positive reputation in Hong Kong and is often linked with other positive political concepts, such as human rights, freedom or liberty. In the view of mainland students, however, it is associated with "social outliers", "losers", or those who were "brainwashed by the Western propaganda." A similar example was shared by ML-C-03. He suggested that "patriotism" is an uncontroversial positive term in mainland China, whereas in Hong Kong it is used more as an agonistic adjective, which is often linked with the "flatter."

The cultural differences about the perceived identity is also challenging. The students reported that Hong Kong students preferred to introduce themselves as being "from Hong Kong" rather

than “I am a Chinese” as it gave them more psychological assurance. In this study, however, it could be misunderstood as “unpatriotic” and violate their unquestionable cognitive norm of being Chinese.

The above findings offer empirical evidence to what Knapp suggested in SPT, where people start to share previously withheld secrets, such as fears, frustrations, failures, imperfections and prejudices with others. These new disclosures may make the speaker vulnerable (Knapp et al, 2014). The revealing of self-vulnerability can improve the friendship by reducing the uncertainty and increasing the psychological closeness (Gudykunst, 1995). In addition, it can reinforce friendship through the form of self-validation since one is typically seeking acceptance or approval for that which has been divulged (Ting-Toomey, 1991; Yum & Canary, 1997). However, this does not mean that more expressions of vulnerability, private interest or sensitive views always mean better friendship. The key is to disclose the right amount of information at the appropriate friendship stage and cultural context.

5.4 Integrating stage: How could we become one collectively?

In Knapp’s model, people at the integrating stage tend to develop specific symbols attitudes, opinions or interests that clearly distinguish the pair from others. This is partially reflected in this study when students developed their secret language (HK-D-01) or shared slang in each culture (HK-D-02). However, language is not the main perceived influential factor at this stage. Instead, the importance of propinquity is particularly recognized by students at this stage, followed by cultural difference and seeking common topics.

The importance of propinquity is well described in ICT, which suggest that culturally dissimilar individuals reduce their intergroup anxiety through frequent contact (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008). ICT suggests that propinquity is of particular importance to break through the level of superficial friendship to a more advanced one. However, this study found that the

propinquity was more recognized by students at the advanced stage due to its pivotal role in encouraging deep self-disclosure and building relational identities.

Relational identity refers to “the identity construction of a mutually beneficial interactive environment in which individuals from two different cultures can function in a way beneficial to all involved” (Casmir, 1999, p. 92), Casmir tends to follow the Emerson’s assumption in SET, while this study further found that it could converge all conflicting identities into a single one. Unlike Berry’s suggestion in acculturation theory, relational identity is not the result of identity negotiation, but a new relational identity in the specific context, such as during overseas exchange (HK-C-01; HK-D-01) and on sports teams (ML-D-01). As students reported, the programme could blur their original host-guest identity, and replace it by a more inclusive identity.

In the same vein, the sharing of slang among teenagers (e.g., Lao Shi Ji or Old Seafood) (HK-C-01) also performs a similar function as it highlights a common “post-90s youth” identity in contrast to the “conservative adult” and blurs the original identity difference.

On the other hand, individual language choice can also show the language-identity linkage. For mainland students, learning-Cantonese was not simply a communication issue, but also a way to show respect and willingness to integrate into the other culture. It is consistent with Norton and Toohey’s suggestion that SLA motivation is dependent on the imagined communities and imagined identities about “*who they might be, and who their communities might be when they learn a language*” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 422).

6. LIMITATIONS

The present study has yielded findings that have both practical and research implications. However, several limitations should be noted.

First, this study is conducted in a unique school setting that is characterized by both bilingual and hybrid-cultural context. Although the findings of this study provide a more comprehensive basis for further discussion, they might not be fully transferable to other institutions.

Second, only students who reported having local or mainland friends were recruited. Students who had difficulties in making cross-cultural friends were simply left out in the inquiry. Further studies of these difficulties, especially for those who failed in establishing friendship with local peers, should be further examined.

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Chapter 5: The role of university in mainland-HK friendship

This chapter is published as a book chapter entitled “Intercultural Communication in the University: Policy and Practices” in an edited book “Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance” in March, 2020.

Article 4: Intercultural Communication in the University: Policy and Practices

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Abstract

In the field of intercultural communication studies, one of the most frequently reported challenges for international students is the lack of intercultural contact with host nationals (Sias et al., 2008). Although Hong Kong (HK) and mainland Chinese share the same Chinese culture heritage which originates from Confucius heritage and the same character writing system, the intercultural communication between mainland and Hong Kong students is also challenging (Ma, 2015) due to the special socio-cultural background of Hong Kong and accelerated social conflicts between Hong Kong and mainland China (Yu & Zhang, 2016). How to facilitate intercultural communication between Hong Kong and mainland students with different university programs and policies has become a vital task of policymakers at the institutional level.

This study is conducted in a university of Hong Kong. Interviews together with document analysis were conducted to explore what are the effective and ineffective policies and activities from the perspectives of policy-makers and administration staff in facilitating the intercultural

communication between local and mainland students. Semi-structured interview was conducted with twenty-four students to reveal their views about university supports towards friendship network formation and intercultural communication. The results revealed there were mismatches between the policies and practices and between students' expectations and university practices. The study also sheds light on implications to university policy making and future research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to globalization, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of non-local students enrolling at different Universities across the world. Hong Kong Universities are also experiencing this global phenomenon. In recent decades, mainland China has become the major source of international students in Hong Kong Universities. There has been a rapid growth of 233% increase in 2018/2019 compared to the number of non-local students in 2008/2009 (University Grants Committee, 2019).

Those who advocate for the recruitment of non-local students believe that this can raise students' intercultural awareness as well as preparing them for the globalized economy. In addition, it is generally agreed that mainland China and Hong Kong share the same Chinese cultural heritage which originate from Confucius's heritage and the similar character writing system (Xu, 2013; Ma, 2015).

However, the establishment of a close relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China students is found to be difficult. This is due to different socio-cultural backgrounds and different University context that mainland China students find uncomfortable (Ma, 2015). Yet, there has been little systematic study to explore the initiatives that the host Universities can enhance the intercultural communication between Hong Kong local and mainland students.

In this study, we sought to develop an understanding of what constitutes effective and ineffective policies for the enhancement of mainland-Hong Kong students' communication. This was achieved by eliciting the perspectives of the university and students. Through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, we examined the students' views about University support towards the formation of friendship networks and intercultural communication. By placing the discussion in the specific context of Hong Kong, this study expects to enrich the overall understanding of the students' needs and University practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Intercultural communication of non-local students

Intercultural communication is an important component for the successful adaptation of non-local students in the host University. It is suggested that having sufficient intercultural communication could increase the level of sociocultural apprehension towards the local community (Williams & Johnson 2011). By having successful experience of intercultural communication, students would be more likely to attend the multicultural events or study abroad activities, which further develop the openness to other cultures (Williams & Johnson 2011).

Intercultural communication is an important component for the successful adaptation of non-local students in the host University. It is suggested that having sufficient intercultural communication could increase the level of sociocultural apprehension towards the local community (Williams & Johnson, 2011). By having successful experience of intercultural communication, students would be more likely to attend the multicultural events or study abroad activities, which further develop the openness to other cultures (Williams & Johnson, 2011). In contrast, non-local students with no intercultural communication with local peers would have poor sociocultural adaptation and feel socially isolated by the local community. As

opposed to psychological or academic adaptation, it is worth noting that the difficulty of sociocultural adaptation is that it does not improve over time. The student who feels socially isolated in the first year would avoid the intercultural contact and find it more difficult to make local friends (Marginson et al., 2010; Gareis et al., 2011).

Regarding the intercultural communication between students from mainland China and local students worldwide, previous researchers have focused on the insufficient language proficiency for intercultural communication. It is observed that the language barriers would isolate non-local students from the host-community and make them struggle with the discussions or oral presentations in the classroom (Sawir, 2005; Yu, 2009). Consequently, this affects the non-local students' academic performance in the University (O'Reilly et al., 2010).

Some researchers further argued that the linguistic confidence of students may not always be related to their actual language proficiency. For example, Jacob and Greggo (2001) found that non-local students often over-emphasized their own mistakes and avoided to make mistakes by reducing intercultural communication. At the inter-group level, it is further argued that the language anxiety would restrict the development of intercultural understanding even when there is an opportunity for social interaction (Yates & Wahid, 2013; Yu, 2013).

While the language researchers highlighted the importance of host-language proficiency, the sociologists tend to focus on the incompatible cultural features. For example, Yeh and Inose (2003) study found that Asian international students may experience more difficulties when interacting and attempting to make friends in a Western culture that emphasizes individualism, assertiveness, and self-sufficiency over interdependence and relatedness. Chen (2005) compared the Asian and European students and reported that Chinese students are more likely to develop the co-national friendship with a common background. Chen (ibid.) explained this

phenomenon using the collectivist culture, which emphasizes “*integrity, in-group membership, and high sociability*” (p. 38). These works of literature point to mainland students experiencing a problem in adopting socio-cultural norms.

In the previous local studies, less attention has been paid to sociocultural difference between mainland and local students. As mentioned before, this is because they share the same Chinese cultural heritage which originates from Confucius heritage and the same character writing system (Ma, 2015). Instead, emphasis is placed on the relationship between the University policy and the student. In this view, the increasingly important role of the University policy and practice is emphasized. It is reported that mainland students lack the opportunity for intercultural contact with locals as Hong Kong people are often detached and lead very busy lives. In this case, mainland students feel uncomfortable to approach the local people either for help or a friendly chat (Pan, 2007). Some researchers extended the research focus from the friendship formation to friendship maintenance. It is frequently reported that mainland students find it difficult to have meaningful contact with local peers, often due to the lack of common topics of conversation (Chiu, 2014) and superficial conversation (Lu, 1998; Chen, 2016). The mainland-HK friendship is even described as a “fleeting” relationship, which is difficult to maintain and develop (Yu & Zhang, 2016).

2.2 University support of intercultural communication

To facilitate the intercultural communication between students, the Universities are expected to take a more active role in promoting more intercultural interaction. In the literature, the major university-centralized support could be categorized into two types: to equip students with satisfactory level of host-language proficiency and to offer the opportunity for intercultural interaction (Chiu, 2014).

2.2.1 University-led activity

Arguably, host-language proficiency is the key communication competence for effective communication (Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Yu & Watkins, 2008). Therefore, many host-institutions have designed different language training courses for improving the communication skills of non-local students (Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Allen et al., 2008). However, some critics argue that those courses may not be so effective as they are not taken into account in the communication practice (Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Allen et al., 2008). It is frequently reported that mainland students lack the opportunity to use Cantonese in daily life or to communicate with local peers (Chiu 2014). On the other hand, the Universities also try to offer opportunities for intercultural interaction by organizing different social activities such as off-campus cultural visits (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006), joint research programs and field trips (Zeng, 2006), and buddy programs (Chan, 2010).

2.2.2 Student-led activity: Social, cultural, and other extra-curricular activities

In the literature, many researchers and practitioners recommended participation in organized extra-curricular activities as a means for non-local students to develop host-national relationships upon arrival in their new cultural environment (Hendrickson 2018). Individuals gain social capital and resources directly from group members and through the connections these members have with other associations (Lin, 2005). Students often build their social networks and host national connections through club membership (Neri & Ville, 2008; Mittelmeier & Kennedy, 2016). Like individuals, each organization varies in terms of the types of connections and network resources they afford members (Lin, 2005). Affiliation with groups laden with local peers provides social connections and information regarding the communication patterns of local peers. Potentially, this helps individuals access to the local community and serves as the foundation for building close relationships with host nationals.

On the other hand, the university would sponsor different types of student activities every year, such as the student union, sport teams, and Hostel Residents' Committee. Though their main

purpose is not for building intercultural relationships, these activities are often reported as the main platform for intercultural interaction (Chan, 2010; Harryba et al., 2013; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). However, although it is generally agreed that the University has played an important role in facilitating intercultural communication, there is no common consensus on whether the University should offer support directly or decentralize the responsibility to lecturers and students.

2.2.3 Practical activity: Daily interaction in the campus

Regarding the opportunity of interaction, a growing body of literature has focused on different intercultural interaction in daily life. Researchers who pioneered studies on international students and friendship networks found that housing international students with local students increases the opportunity for students to have contact with the host culture (Savicki, 2010) and students tend to establish intercultural friendships in situations where efforts to initiate relationships are minimal (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). Kim (2001) also focused on the environmental factor. They suggested that the “host-receptivity” determined the accessibility of host nationals to international students, which often referred to as interaction, opportunities for contact, and the potential to develop a close relationship.

On the other hand, the classroom is considered as another setting that offers an opportunity for friendship development with host nationals through consistent contact and group projects (Stearns et al., 2009; Ruan & Zhu, 2015). The classroom situates students in proximity with host nationals who share academic interests (Bennett et al., 2013) and facilitates interaction through team learning (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013).

2.3 Debate about the role of university in intercultural communication

The debate about the university-centralized support mainly centers on three major themes: whether it raises administrative efficiency, whether it addresses the specific needs of students, and whether it encourages the active participation of students and thus improve the quality of interaction.

Advocates for centralized-planning argue that this allows the university-manager to make decisions and coordinate the overall activities more easily. It also ensures a more systematic and substantial support to the non-local students (Gonzalez, 2009; Nieri, 2012). At the individual level, it is argued that the centralized-planning support allows for better response to the specific students' needs. It is assumed the student-directed planning could develop more relevant activities that are best suited to students' needs and interests. At the same time, the decentralized approach would guarantee more participation from various students, thus enhancing student motivation for participating in their own intercultural activities (Preedy & Jones, 2017).

Although considerable effort has been made to facilitate intercultural interaction between international and local students, rather less attention has been paid to whether and how the university and teachers may facilitate the intercultural communication and friendship development.

To sharpen the discussion focus, this study explores the staff and students' views on the current University support for mainland students and what expectations they hold as shown in the following research questions:

- 1. From the students' view, which university's initiatives are considered as the most effective (and least effective) with regards to the mainland-HK friendship development?*
- 2. How do the existing university's initiatives contribute to the development of*

mainland-HK friendship?

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research design

To address the research questions, a multiple case study design was adopted. It is often seen as prime examples of qualitative research which allows the researcher and the participant to illuminate or draw attention to different context and express the subjective meanings that people bring to their situation (De Vaus, 2001).

3.2 Sampling

The invitation letter was sent to all students (Year-2 or above). The study involved 24 University students (12 mainland and 12 Hong Kong students) who were recruited from a medium-sized Hong Kong University. Using semi-structured interviews (see Section 9.4), the students were asked to share their friendship formation. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese or Putonghua, depending on the participants' native language.

On the other hand, the Executive Manager of Student Affairs Office (SAO) was invited to participate as the key informant in an interview. SAO is the main unit which provides the major support to all mainland students, while the executive manager is responsible for the planning, coordination, and evaluation of all activities. It was assumed that the key informant interview could represent the university's view and give the researcher first-hand knowledge about the university's position. The interviews were audio-recorded with the endorsement of participants.

All student participants were required to fulfill the following criteria: (i) being enrolled on a Fulltime Undergraduate or Postgraduate program; (ii) having been living in Hong Kong for more than 12 months; (iii) having arrived in Hong Kong less than 6 months before the

programme started (Mainland students only); (iv) having reported as having a satisfied level of intercultural communication with Hong Kong students (or “with mainland students” for HK participants). It was assumed that students with study period over 12 months could have had enough peer-interaction and offer sufficient data for analysis, while the nonromantic friendship can ensure that the reported experience could have a less emotional bias.

3.3 Data analysis

After the data collection, constant comparison approach was used as the analysis strategy to organize the interview transcripts, where the data collection and analysis are not independent phases but a continuous cycle (Glaser, 1967). The new data were continuously compared with the initial categories, and new categories created when the new data could not be embedded in any of the existing groups.

In practice, the constant comparison approach involved going through a three-level coding process (open, axial, and selective coding) from the most descriptive to the most interpretative level (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2009).

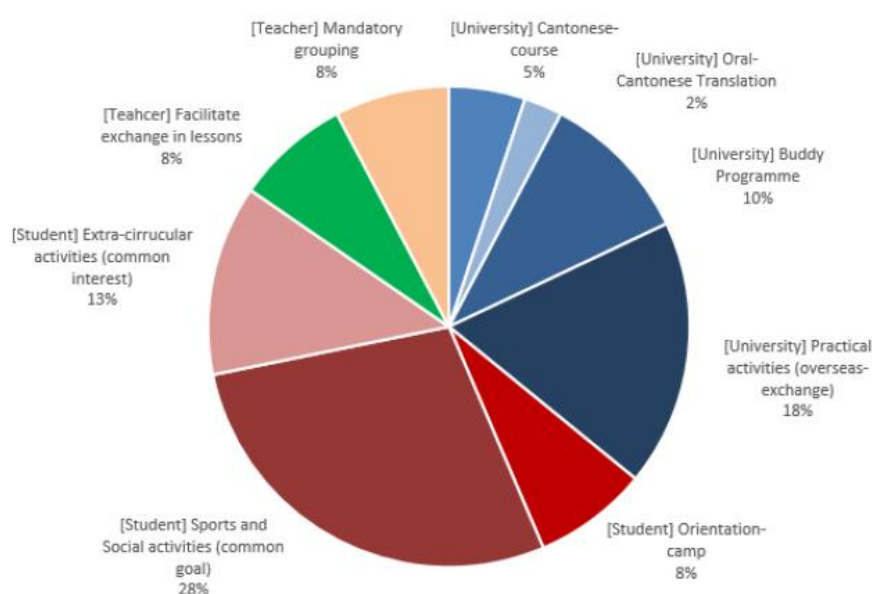
4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, a considerable majority of students (N=20, 83%) reported that the University has tried to facilitate the intercultural communication through different activities. In addition, 58% (N=7) Hong Kong students and 42% (N=5) mainland students agreed that the University’s initiative is effective in facilitating the communication between mainland and Hong Kong students.

Table 1*Students' view about the effectiveness of university's initiative (N=24)*

	Hong Kong students (%)	Mainland students (%)
The university has encouraged the intercultural communications	83.3%	75%
The university has not encouraged the intercultural communication	16.7%	25%
The university's attempt is effective	58.3%	41.6%
The university's attempt is not effective	41.7%	33.4%
Neutral	0	25%

Regarding the types of university initiatives, seven main categories emerged from the students' perspective. It was found that the student-led activities (Orientation Camp and Student's society) were reported as the most effective ones (49%), while 36% of the students selected the university-led activities, including Cantonese course, Buddy program, and cultural tours, and shared their experience in the interview (Figure 1).

Figure 1*Effective university's initiative as perceived by students*

4.1 Effective university-initiative as perceived by students

4.1.1 Orientation-camp, student society, and other extra-curricular activities

In the interview, the participation in extracurricular activities was reported as the major factor for the formation of mainland-HK friendship. In general, four kinds of activities were identified: (i) practical activities, (ii) physical activities, (iii) social activities, and (iv) cultural activities.

4.1.2 Practical activity: Overseas exchange programme

During the overseas exchange however, the situation would be completely different. In the interview, many students considered it as the key event which promotes their friendship development. For example:

When I visit foreign countries together with my (Mainland) friends, I had a strong sense of “national identity” and felt that both of us are Chinese..... it gave us a dynamic context to face an unfamiliar world together, which I had never experienced before (HK-01)

We will perceive greater similarity in Australia. We speak Cantonese, face the same challenge, and solve everything together in a united group. Different from Hong Kong, we did not have any identity of host or guest anymore. We could talk about almost anything (ML-04)

The above findings were partially supported by the previous friendship studies, which suggested that more frequent interaction would reduce intergroup anxiety or develop a more positive attitude towards other cultural groups (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). More than that, it shows a quality shift from acquaintance to friends in the overseas exchange program. It is because in the overseas context, the commonality would be particularly highlighted in such an unfamiliar environment as both mainland and Hong Kong students must resolve the unknown

challenge in academic and daily life. Not only could it blur the original host-guest boundary but also converge different cultural values and identities (Casmir, 1999). Through the establishment of another inclusive identity “Chinese,” their identity and the cultural difference would then recede into the background (Lee, 2006).

4.1.3 Sports and social activities: Pursuing the common goal

The interview demonstrated that the students with close mainland-HK friendship were often involved in a variety of sports or social activities, ranging from Sport team, Student Hostel Committees, Student unions, or other different student societies. Several students stated that they made most of their local friends in extra-curricular activities outside the classroom, and met their best friends there (ML-03/ML-10/ML-08). A mainland student elaborated on the role of extra-curricular activities in her friendship development:

We got to know each other when we joined the dragon boat team. We trained together and almost in the same class throughout the semester. Then we sat together and did most of the project activities together (ML-08)

The most useful one is the Hall-Management Committee. I am a member of the “secret-sharing group,” which is responsible for listening to the unhappy experience of others. Not only the romantic experience, but also the challenges in friendship, academic or others. It helps us make good friends and increases our mutual understanding with each other. I become less hesitant to disclose myself as well (ML-03)

In the orientation-camp, you work together to achieve different tasks and live together for several days. It is easy for you to become familiar with each other (ML-04)

I will suggest the upcoming student to join different volunteer activities, the

orientation camp or student society. They could help them to integrate into the local community and make many friends (ML-10)

This finding is consistent with the previous study which states that international students would moderate access to the informal culture of the local community and lead to better sociocultural adaptation through participation in recreation activities (Glass et al., 2014). Through the participation of different social activities, students interact with others who have a similar goal in context, where neither local students nor mainland students have to make additional efforts to spend a considerable amount of time together and meet regularly. Second, the team-duty encouraged a wider and deeper self-disclosure (ML-03/ML-04). Also, the student alluded to the solidarity that stems from sport-team and its extension to other social activities (ML-08), which facilitated the mainland-HK friendship development through different tasks.

Moreover, to achieve the common goal of the whole team, it is important to build up a team spirit and tacit knowledge between each other. Similarly to the other overseas exchange, a relational identity, e.g. dragon-boat team, would be established during the activity and blur the background identity between each other.

4.1.3 Extra-curricular activities (common interest)

In the past, numerous studies reported that common interest breeds connection and liking. Not only does it contribute to initial attraction, but also the development of close friendship bond (Parker & Seal, 1996; McPherson et al., 2001; Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007). It is also reflected in the interview:

At first, she is a friend of my roommate. Once, I cooked something and posted it online. She gave me a “like,” and we started chatting with each other. She loves cooking as well and invited me to cook together. I also invited her to come to have dinner together (ML-09).

Moreover, the participation in extra-curricular activities was particularly important for those not living in a hostel who have little to no contact with local students in the class and do not share the same university space. The above student suggested that the cooking party and Christian's weekly gathering (ML-09) are the main connections between her and the local friend, as her part-time study schedule is completely different from the local. Besides, it is worth noting that the selection of extra-curricular activities is sometimes regarded as a way to build up the personal image:

The new students should join the student activities, which could show your strength..... Once you could show your strength, other students will approach you directly. If you are the weakest one in the team, and everyone looks down to you, you still cannot make friends even if you join all sessions (ML-11)

The findings reconfirmed the works of literature, which suggested that the extra-curricular activities could facilitate intercultural interaction and communication (Chen, 2016; Glass et al., 2014). However, this study stepped forwards and showed that the selection of extra-curricular activities is also important since it is regarded as an opportunity to build a more desirable identity by showing personal strength. It reflects that, in their view, selecting a more favourable context, rather than personal factor is more important to their friendship development.

4.1.4 Matching buddy: Ambassador programme and mentorship

Apart from the extra-curricular activities, the University has launched the buddy programme "I-ambassador," which is the second most frequent shared activity in the interview (10%). In the mentorship program, the senior students (both local or mainland students) would be recruited as the student-mentors. They would be responsible for two parts: (i) Tea-gathering: Sharing their experience and precautions that the new students take while living in Hong Kong;

(ii) Plan and lead some activities (such as cultural tours, hand-out workshops or Movie nights) to share own cultures.

In general, the buddy programme is highly appreciated by the mainland students as it could help them adapt to the campus life smoothly by being responsive to their individual needs:

The most helpful one is the buddy programme. An experienced mainland student is arranged to give us advice on everything. When I am not sure what I should prepare for a certain event, or what precaution I should take care of, she can give us useful advice (ML-03).

From the above, the mentor could provide more detailed advice to mainland students on an individual basis, and help them better prepare for the unknown challenge. It is of particular importance for supporting the non-local students. It is because most non-local students do not know what they need or what precaution is required until they face some difficulties.

The advice from the senior mainland students, however, may not always be accurate. For example:

Many new mainland students may ask mentors whether Hong Kong students discriminate against mainland students, or if it is difficult to integrate into local community. The mentor often says there will be discrimination..... However, you still have to experience it yourself. Their experience could be a reference, but you should not completely believe others. Don't label Hong Kong students before meeting them (ML-D-01)

From the above, it seems that the sharing section may increase the risk of intercultural anxiety later in university-life due to the subjective and biased-views of the senior students. To prevent the biased view, therefore, the University should coach the student-mentors first and help them to express their views in a neutral way.

4.1.5 Language support and enhancement

In the interview, the SAO particularly emphasized the importance of Cantonese-learning course and suggested that it is the most welcomed activities among mainland students:

We have five “Survival Cantonese Workshops” this year, and they have been full already..... We will teach the common Cantonese words and phrases with different phrase, such as transportation, ordering food, go shopping etc. Every course have two sessions, where the student could freely sign-up for different sessions (SAO)

It is consistent with the students’ view, which agreed that the course is helpful for them to learn Cantonese through diversified themes. Moreover, this was considered as another platform for making friends:

When we arrive, there is a Cantonese-speaking group. I could learn Cantonese from Hong Kong peers. It is very interesting, and my Cantonese proficiency has been improving significantly (ML-01)

If you’d like to make more mainland friendship, I suggest you join the learning activity of ASLLC (Arthur Samy Language Learning Centre). There are language learning series, or one-off workshops about English, Putonghua and other third languages.

Most students are from mainland China, while Hong Kong student are a minority there (HK-04)

Though only 6% of the students talked about the Cantonese-learning course, it does not mean that it is not important as almost half of the mainland students highlighted the pivotal role of Cantonese-proficiency in the development of friendship with local students. Also, the oral

translation of Cantonese in the Orientation-camp is reported by different mainland students as an important university-support at the beginning stage (ML-06/ML-03/ML-C-04).

The less perceived importance of Cantonese course is probably because the students to value the Cantonese learning in practice, rather than attending the courses. However, this study showed that the students still lack the confidence to practice their Cantonese after the lesson, which results in an elevated level of anxiety and hesitation to join Cantonese-speaking activities:

When I was invited to local activities, I would firstly ask if they can speak Putonghua. If yes, then I will go. If English, I will hesitate, but can still attend. If all Cantonese, I will surely not join (ML-09)

When there are mainland students in the classroom discussion, we seldom talk with each other and discuss with co-national peers separately. My Cantonese is so poor, so do they. (ML-01)

The above sharing showed that the barrier of intercultural communication is not only about student's level of language proficiency but anxiety is another possible barrier. As noted by Dörnyei and Schmidt (2001), "language learning is one of the most face-threatening university subjects" (p. 9), while the language learning anxiety is weakest for children, and strongest for adults (MacIntyre et al., 1998). This study revealed that language anxiety of adult students would affect their L2 usage in a host-community that they are unfamiliar with (Clement and Noel 2001).

Moreover, it is found that some mainland students expected that locals should accommodate them:

Some Hong Kong people are not willing to speak Putonghua. This is not because of poor proficiency, they just do not want to speak it: "Why should I speak Putonghua?"

Why would the University develop Putonghua curriculum? The mainland student should integrate with us, we should not accommodate them” (ML-03)

From the view of mainland students, the willingness to speak Putonghua (PTH) is considered as an indicator of local's hospitality, whereas it is not agreed by the SAO and Hong Kong students:

Do in Rome as Rome does. The Cantonese is the native of most local students, it is unrealistic for you to ask local students to accommodate you. If you need to integrate into the local community, you must try to speak (Cantonese) (SAO).

I am not good at Putonghua. I thought both of us should compromise and use English, which is the second language for both of us. There is no reason to expect me to follow you. If people do not understand what you say, and you still insist, no one will want to communicate with you (HK-04)

The unrealistic expectation of mainland students may be explained by the concept of Language standardization. When the Putonghua becomes the national language and acquired prestige, all dialects would be considered as the unstandardized language and need to be “corrected” (Rosa 2016). The mainland student may not place such expectation on the local student in English-speaking countries, but Hong Kong, as it is already sovereignty of China.

4.2 Less effective university-initiatives as perceived by students

4.2.1 Cultural event and tour

Every year, the University organizes different visiting activities, such as the Cultural Tour to Central District, Tsz Shan Monastery, and Legislative Council in 2018/2019 (SAO 2019). In the view of introducing Hong Kong, the local cultural tour may be a successful event, whereas it is an ineffective approach to improving intercultural interactions as perceived by mainland students:

I have joined the SAO activities before. Most participants are mainland students, and most Hong Kong students are over year 3. The local peers in the same cohort seldom join us. It occupies too much Wednesday and Weekend time, which is their “golden time” to concentrate on their own work (ML-05)

Most SAO activities are for the mainland students, such as the visit to the peak and the Stanley beach, whereas there were only very few local students. Perhaps they have been there many times already (ML-09).

I have joined a visiting tour to Stanley. However, the local students would only play among themselves, so do the mainland students. We seldom communicate with each other (ML-01)

The above sharing revealed two problems (i) lacking attractiveness to local students and (ii) unfitting schedule. It is consistent with Chiu’s study that most off-campus cultural visits are not attractive enough to local students and this makes the activity no more intercultural (Chiu, 2014). Indeed, the SAO manager also acknowledged the problem, whereas he suggested that they still have to focus on the mainland students’ interest first as it is their main responsibility. Also, it is unrealistic to focus on attracting local participants. It is because they have too many activities, such as doing part-time or maintaining other local social networks. Instead, the SAO manager focused on recruiting more local student-mentors and expected that individual friendships would be developed through the mentor-mentee interaction. It is reported that SAO would encourage local students in different ways.

First, SAO would provide the “letter of achievement” so that the student-mentors could claim their intercultural experience in their CV (curriculum vitae). Second, the SAO would provide the opportunity for local students to express their strength by organizing different events. For example, SAO would recruit the students who are majoring in Chinese Education to be the

Student Instructors. SAO only coach them briefly at the beginning, and they would prepare all teaching materials and have the autonomy to plan the Cantonese-lesson. Third, SAO seeks financial support from the University and recruits the student-mentors with a Part-time salary. Although different incentives were provided, the SAO admitted that the self-willingness of intercultural interaction is still the main reason that attracts local students to join.

4.2.2 Accommodation arrangement

Practical activity mainly involves the accommodation, administration, and infrastructure, where the students were grouped in the class, hostel or programme randomly. In this interview, the students were aware of the importance of propinquity:

Our hall would try to group the students with the same language or cultural background. Students with different cultural background seldom live together..... mainland students often have higher priority when getting hostel accommodation and choose their roommates from the co-national peers (HK-01)

The mainland students in the hostel have a strong social tie, whereas most local students live at home and always rush to the shuttle-bus station immediately after the lesson. Though we are on the same campus, we seldom meet each other outside the classroom (ML-04)

From the above excerpt, the hostel accommodation is considered as an important platform to maintain frequent intercultural interaction. However, the cultural difference is considered as a potential problem in the view of the hostel manager, rather than an opportunity for cultural sharing. It is understandable in the view of the hostel manager, whereas it may reduce the opportunity of intercultural interaction in daily life.

4.2.3 Mandatory grouping at the classroom level

Although the previous section suggested that physical propinquity plays an important role in intercultural communication and relationship development, it is not entirely applicable to academic activities. In this study 20% of the students suggested that the lecturer's effort to promote intercultural communication is effective, it is still debatable as some of these initiatives are reported to be ineffective as well. According to the interview, the lecturer would have three ways to facilitate the mainland-HK communication in the lesson. The first way is to modify the grading criteria. For example:

In the beginning, we seldom communicate with each other until the lecturer stated that he only gives high grades if we ask questions to the presenter. Then the mainland students started to approach me (HK-01)

Some classroom discussions require the formation of groups, and the lecturer will ask us to include non-local students in every group (HK-02)

The second way is to include mainland students during the instruction or classroom discussion. The mainland students are invited to share their first-hand experience to verify the teaching materials. For example:

Our topics often involve the comparison of education systems between Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China. The lecturer would invite us to share the experience, and the local students are so interested in our sharing. During break time, we would continue the discussion and ask about each other's university experience (ML-09)

In the interview, the mainland students reflected that they are more comfortable with the latter one, though such one-to-group setting hardly leads to further communication after class. On the other hand, some lecturers may not have careful consideration about it, which may unintentionally create the intercultural conflict:

The lecturer plays a game and invites us to share the first impression about mainland people. My groupmate suggested “dirty” and “noisy,” which makes me really angry. So I also say “Kong Girl” (Girls with undesirable personality, e.g. materialistic, self-centered and bad-tempered) when describing the Hong Kong people (ML-08)

The third way is to implement the “mandatory grouping” in group project. However, it is not welcomed by local students. For example:

When the lecturer asked us to accept her, we were a bit hesitant as we were worried about the communication. And, she seems to be quite sensitive. However, it is only a micro-teaching, which should not be a problem (HK-04)

During the classroom discussion, I only talk with my friend, and she discusses with her mainland peers also. Though we are in the same group, we would discuss separately. My Putonghua is so poor (HK-02)

The mainland students may be marginalized if they are the minority in the group....The lecturer could encourage us, but it is still students’ own choice on whether they accept or not (HK-01)

The ineffectiveness of mandatory groupings is related to the fact that they may be violating the voluntary nature of friendship (Pahl, 2000; Beer, 2001; Keller, 2004). Indeed, relationship development may be at risk from the involuntary interaction because of its inability to ensure meaningful communication, equal status, intimacy during the communication (Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997). From the above, moreover, the students may gain the negative experience of intercultural interaction due to the language barrier, which may make them less likely to be involved in the intercultural communication afterwards.

The finding provides an alternative view to the assumption of Intergroup-contact theory, where more frequent contact does not always lead to a more positive outcome. Indeed, previous studies have suggested that the impact of superficial contact is highly conditioned by the characteristics of subjective contact experiences. For example, Barlow et al. (2012) found that actual intergroup contact increases prejudice towards out-group members when the majority hold negative (i.e. unpleasant) contact experiences. Therefore, the university needs to make more preparation in advance, rather than simply putting a diverse group of students together.

5. CONCLUSION

To summarize, there was considerable support for promoting intercultural communication and friendship despite having room for improvement.

In general, the student-led activities (e.g. physical and social activities, common interest, and overseas exchange) are perceived as more effective in promoting the intercultural communication and friendship. Through the interviews, it was found that the establishment of the relational identity is the key to successful integration as it encourages the student sharing and fades out the host-guest identity. Moreover, they often promote the frequent, sustainable, and positive interaction which would be of mutual benefit to each other.

The university-led activities provide indirect support or platform for interaction. The Cantonese-learning course, for example, is the most appreciated and useful one in the view of mainland students as it equips them with basic language proficiency for the daily interactions. Second, the Buddy matching program, e.g., Global Ambassador or Mentorship with senior students, provides a supportive environment to mainland students' for better sociocultural and academic adaptation.

On the other hand, the local cultural tour and mandatory grouping in the class are reported as the less effective initiatives. One of the reasons is that those activities do not always fit with the

interest or schedule of local students and hence making them less attractive to locals. Also, the language barrier prevents or limits the academic and social communication between mainland and Hong Kong students, even though they are forced to group together.

6. IMPLICATION

The findings of this study have several implications that may help University managers to identify practical and effective interventions for improving intercultural communication and friendship.

6.1 Sustainability of the activity

First, this study sharpened awareness of ensuring sustainable interaction after the activities. In this study, students reported that they had a positive interaction with local friends and exchanged their contact during the orientation-camp, cultural tours, or university events, whereas friendship takes time to manifest and does not always materialize after the first encounter. As a result, some students hesitate to participate again due to a lack of confidence in keeping such a fleeting relationship. In addressing this concern, the university should try an inclusive social environment and group students with common background (e.g., from the same subject or hostel) together in different activities, so that it becomes easier to maintain the social tie with their relational identity at certain aspects.

6.2 Good matching of students' mutual benefit

Second, this study illustrates avenues whereby mainland and Hong Kong students join the activities for mutual benefit. In previous studies, the lack of local students' participation in the intercultural activities is frequently highlighted, whereas very few studies are directed towards how to motivate them to participate (Chiu, 2014; Ma, 2012). It is reconfirmed in this study that the university-led activity is generally less attractive to local students. However, the university has to target the mainland students first, and hence, it is difficult to address the interests of local students though it acknowledged the limitation.

To compromise, the University tends to attract the local students to be the mentors or instructors, rather than the participants. To attract more participation of local students, the

university tried to assure that both mainland and Hong Kong students can gain something out of the relationship (e.g., social integration versus the practice of a certain language). To local students, it would be good to let them know that not only could the intercultural activities provide an opportunity to practice Putonghua, but it could also help them gain teaching experience and develop leadership skills during the process. Furthermore, an extra encouragement for students' participation could be provided such as part-time employment contracts and the provision of letters of achievement.

The emphasis of the tangible reward is consistent with the Social Exchange Theory, where the potential benefit as perceived by people indicates the attractiveness and serves as the basis of the long-lasting relationship (Sunnafrank, 1990; Ramirez et al., 2010). In other words, the students would have more motivation to deepen the relationship if they know they could learn more from others. However, to achieve the above objectives, it may be useful to know the expectation of local mentors in the buddy-programme so that the university could provide better matching of the incoming students to the local buddies.

6.3 Shaping expectation

In light of all of these practical implications, universities may need to reconceptualize the traditional view of the staff and students' academic and social interactions. During the interviews, it was found that mainland students tend to view the academic and social interactions from a zero-sum perspective. They often give academic interactions the highest priority over recreation, social development, and other activities. However, different studies showed that social support with host-nationals could help non-local students learn a series of culturally relevant skills, facilitate their academic success (Furnham 2004; Ward et al. 2005; Bista and Foster 2016), and overcome their psychological stress and loneliness (Bartram and Casimir 2007).

Therefore, to encourage more intercultural communication the university have to change their mindsets and let students know about the benefit of gaining social support. Also, the student needs to realize that learning does not only happen in the classroom, but also takes place within the intercultural interactions every moment. Moreover, the University staff must themselves be highly efficient and effective intercultural learners, with the skills to encourage student integration rather than keeping it casual.

6.4 Higher level of collaboration with student union, societies, and others

During the interviews, the student-led activities are perceived as more effective in terms of promoting intercultural communication and friendship development; however, the student support unit only had a loose connection with the student union, societies, and hostel-management committee, which were limited to experience and information sharing.

To offer more systematic support, the University should carry more weight in student-led activities and take the partnership to a higher level of collaboration, such as providing financial support, coaching the students, or inviting them to propose intercultural activities. The University could also coach the students and let them pay particular attention to setting up the strategies that encompass the sustainability or mutuality, which drive the buddy participants towards a meaningful membership.

However, it is worth noting that the advanced University student collaboration should be on an equal basis, which aims to offer support and experience sharing, rather than monitoring approach. Not only because the student organizer would have a better understanding about what other students need, but also because adolescents are subject to more peer influence than adults (Steinberg & Schwartz, 2000).

7. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations are acknowledged in this study.

First, we invited the students who self-reported as “having a satisfying level of intercultural communication.” Though this study provides insight into the students’ views about the effectiveness of different university initiatives, our analysis does not include the students who failed to initiate any intercultural communication. Future research should examine what challenges or difficulties are experienced by those students and explore how the Universities could further encourage local students with low willingness to communicate with mainland students, and vice versa.

Second, the sample size is relatively small. It is appropriate for an exploratory study, whereas it limited our ability to generalize our findings in other university contexts. However, despite these limitations, the present exploratory study provides useful insights into the subjective experience and perceptions of the university’s initiatives, which offer a useful heuristic starting point for future work examining the university policy and intercultural communication and friendship development.

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Chapter 6: The role of online social-networks in mainland-HK friendship

This chapter is drafted in a standard manuscript format, entitled “Bridging platform or echo chamber? The role of online social-networks in the development of mainland-Hong Kong friendships”. It is still under review at an US academic journal.

Article 5: Bridging platform or echo chamber? The role of online social-networks in the development of mainland-Hong Kong friendships

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Abstract

Although intercultural communication has become commonplace in an age of internationalization, there is no common consensus on whether online social-networks (OSN) facilitate or inhibit the intercultural interaction. Addressing this research gap, the present study examined the role of OSN in intercultural friendship development. One hundred and fifty-nine students were invited to fill in a survey about their choices of using OSN and their satisfaction with their current mainland-HK friendships. Twenty-four students were further invited to share their experiences in semi-structured interviews.

The findings revealed that (a) Instant-messaging platform (IMP) built up a sense of “presence awareness,” which strengthens the pre-existing friendship and solidifies offline connections; (b) Social Networking site (SNS) helped students explore their common interests and concurrently revealed values and cultural differences; (c) both mainland and Hong Kong students showed an awareness of an “echo-chamber effect” of OSN but showed different

responses. The study sheds light on the differences between mainland and Hong Kong students, as well as the participants' perceptions at different friendship stages.

Keywords

Intercultural communication; intercultural friendship; online social network; Internet; instant-messaging platform

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, online social networks (OSN) have introduced a new mode of interpersonal communication and gained immense popularity for establishing interpersonal relationships among students worldwide (Chan & Cheng, 2004; Ward & Tracey, 2004). Millennials have grown up in a digital generation where integrating technology into their social lives is natural for them (Erstad (2012). Given its asynchronous nature and public accessibility, OSN provides a convenient platform for students to share opinions, understand each other and build up a virtual self-image (Krasnova, Kolesnikova, & Guenther, 2010; Sunden, 2003).

In the field of intercultural communication, many weighty issues surrounding OSN, such as the comparison between online and offline conversation topics (Adler & Proctor, 2007; Barak, 2007; Barak & Bloch, 2006), the psychological impact (Park, Jin, & Jin, 2009; Turkle, 2011) and the social impact of OSN on individuals (Sheldon, 2009; Zuo, 2015) have become popular research interests.

Although the importance of OSN is frequently highlighted in the literature, rather less attention has been paid on how people view the specific natures of OSN and make use of OSN to build intercultural friendships. Also, recent local studies have reported that online spaces appear to be more politically infused than offline space, where most anti-Mainland China discussions take place (Tian, 2017). Thus, there is a need to further investigate how individuals respond to online strife in politically infused conversations.

Addressing the above concerns, this study aims to examine the perceived role of OSN in the development of mainland-HK friendships and compare the strengths and limitations of OSN and face-to-face (FTF) interactions. Moreover, since the socio-political tension between mainland and Hong Kong grew rapidly in 2019, this study investigates how students view the impact of online conflicts on mainland-HK interactions at the individual and intergroup levels. In particular, students' views and responses on sensitive topics and the echo-chamber effect are addressed.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

Having friendships with domestic students has long been identified as a major contributor to the sojourner's successful adjustment and sociocultural adaptation. Not only can it provide emotional support and relieve their acculturation stress in the unfamiliar environment (Yeh & Inose, 2003), it can also provide non-local students with several benefits, including information sources, resources, and a sense of belonging (Parks, 2007). Its importance is supported by Ingman (2003) and Yeh and Inose's study (2003), which found that international students who feel connected to a host country's social network are less likely to experience symptoms of acculturative stress (Ingman, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Hendrickson and his colleagues further reported that participants who reported more friendship variability with the host country described themselves as more satisfied and more socially connected (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011).

2.1 Mainland-HK friendship: Friendship in the sibling culture

In the past, mainland and Hong Kong were considered sibling cultures, sharing "*a common language and much of their cultural heritage but subtle differences exist*" (Zeng & Watkins, 2006, p.41). However, the subtle cultural differences do not mean an easy integration of mainland students with their local peers. In Yu and Zhang's study (2016), for example, Hong

Kong is described as “more foreign than a foreign country” (p.8). Ruan and Zhu’s cross-institutional survey also reported that more than 60% of mainland students do not have close local friends, while only 18% of mainland students claimed to have close local friends (Ruan & Zhu, 2015). It is generally agreed that no single factor can fully explain the challenges of building mainland-HK friendships. Not only do mainlanders lack the opportunity to interact with local peers, but they also experience intense value and cultural conflicts (Tian, 2017).

Regarding the opportunity of interaction, the role of the university and education-setting have been highlighted by different studies. For example, Yu and Zhang (2016) found that mainland students have limited opportunities to get acquainted with others or are confined to the same group of classmates. This is because the flexible study path allows students to take a variety of courses before deciding their major in the 2nd year. Tian (2017) focused on the lack of shared space and found that the fragmented living space of students limited their opportunity for interaction or gaining shared experience.

Even when mainland and local students have had the opportunity to establish initial contacts, it is difficult to further develop their relationship due to the lack of common topics (Chiu, 2014) and the two entities carry on only superficial conversations (Lu, 1998; Pan, 2007). The students may have the experience of instrumental-oriented collaboration for the purposes of studying; however, it is still difficult to form close friendships due to the absence of a mutually engaging experience (Tian, 2017).

At the inter-group level, the conflict appears in terms of work-life balance, life-plan and deeply-held political views (Chiu, 2014; Ma, 2015). For mainland students, politics is considered a taboo topic in interpersonal encounters (Tian, 2017); however, conflicting views are still reflected in online media, Facebook postings, and various Internet-infused protests against mainland Chinese, which has created a negative political climate without free and open

dialogue (Tian, 2017). The tension between the mainland and Hong Kong has become more complicated due to prevailing anti-mainland sentiment and social unrest in 2019-20.

2.2 The role of OSN in mainland-HK friendships

OSN refers to an online platform that allows individuals to build social networks or relations that connect them to other users (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). These can be accomplished through websites known as Social Networking Sites (SNS) (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Weibo), which serve as a web-based virtual community for sharing media, exchanging messages, and establishing social, content-oriented or professional contact (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). At the individual level, this can also be accomplished by Instant-messaging Platforms (IMP) (e.g., WhatsApp, WeChat, Viber, Line or Skype), which allow users to send and receive short text-based messages, photos or emoji in real-time and to see who else is online and currently available to receive messages (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Webster 2005).

In the literature, its importance has been extensively examined from different perspectives:

2.2.1 Social-exchange perspective: Reduce the cost and effort for friendship maintenance

The social-exchange perspective argues that people calculate the overall worth of a particular relationship by subtracting its costs from the rewards it provides (Monge & Contractor, 2003). Most researchers with this view take an optimistic view of OSN's influence as it allows people to transcend the physical boundaries of the real world and keep a connection with others anytime and anywhere (Castells, 2001). It is of particular importance for those with limited opportunities to interact, since it greatly reduces the effort and time-cost to keep people connected to each other.

Regarding its impact on the existing friendship, Cameron and Webster (2005) described OSN as providing “the sense of presence awareness” and “virtual proximity,” where both can

strengthen pre-existing social relations and solidify offline connections. Their view is echoed by LaRose's study, which found that the function of OSN is attached to social interactions in the real world which can greatly accelerate relationship development; however, it does not help much if the individual is also has difficulty making friends outside the Internet (LaRose et al., 2012).

2.2.2 Psychological perspective: More interaction, less anxiety

Apart from friendship development, OSN is also important for preparing non-local students for intercultural communication Gudykunst's Anxiety-Uncertainty Management Theory (AUMT) considers anxiety as the fundamental problem of ineffective intercultural communication. Gudykunst defined effective communication as minimizing misunderstandings, while the reduction of certainty (inability to predict or explain others' attitudes, behaviour, and feelings) and anxiety (feelings of being uneasy, tense, worried, or apprehensive) are the keys to successful intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 2005). In friendship studies, AUMT is often discussed with Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT), which suggests that more frequent opportunities for interaction can reduce prejudice between groups of people.

In combination with the ICT, OSN is particularly useful for facilitating intercultural communication as it provides an alternative platform for interpersonal communication. Moreover its anonymous and asynchronous nature can also create an environment for those who struggle with poor interpersonal communication skills or high communication anxiety (Park & Noh, 2017; Sheldon, 2009). Moreover, its asynchronous nature provides a kind of security and protects people from the risk of face-to-face rejection (Park & Lee, 2014; Ward & Tracey, 2004). Regarding the acculturation of non-locals, Zhang's study (2017) about Facebook suggested that it provides a "stress-buffering effect," which brings people relief from stress and provides social support. It is also known as the "Poor-Get-Richer" hypothesis that

those with higher communication anxiety could receive more benefit from online social networks (Bargh, 2002).

The benefits of OSN have been reported at the individual level; however, some researchers hold a rather pessimistic view of its impact on intercultural friendship. First, although OSN allows overseas students to keep connections with friends and family members in the home country providing a comfort zone, it also eliminates their need to seek social support from locals (Ellison et al., 2007; Kim, 2007). Moreover, Kuss and Griffiths (2012) warned that OSN inhibits the development of social skills among teenagers because individuals can “communicate” without reading facial expression of others.

Second, some researchers have questioned the authenticity of self-disclosure on the Internet and suggested that the OSN allows people to show a distilled version of their best characteristics in the virtual community. It would lead to an incomplete or biased understanding of each other when others read posts and believe it represents the “authentic self” of others (Turkle, 2011).

Third, other researchers have warned that an overreliance on OSN may erode social ties by increasing the volume of interactions and decreasing their depth. For example, Turkle’s study (2011) about self-disclosure content found that OSN’s convenience for interaction could increase the volume of information exchange; however, people are less likely to have deep conversations and make most online-relationship superficial. Similarly, Chen (2013) also reported frequent use of OSN can substitute original strong social ties in the physical world with larger numbers of weak social ties.

2.2.3 Social-identity perspective

Social-identity perspective addresses the ways that social identities affect people's attitudes and behaviour regarding their ingroup and outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Triandis, 1995).

Previously, most acculturation studies about immigrants have focused on the conflict between home- and host identity and home society, while they further extend to the discussion about the sub-cultural and relational identities (Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014; Kudo, Volet, & Whitsed, 2019). Researchers holding this perspective have often focused on how the context facilitates the development of social identity during interaction. For example, the present author's own study (2020) examined the university setting in Hong Kong and reported that relational identities in the sub-cultural group can blur cultural boundaries and facilitate intercultural friendship development.

Regarding the development of relational identity, OSN also plays a crucial role as it can reveal the similarity or personal attractiveness that is rarely shown in the physical world. This was first noted by Castells (2001), who suggested that personal exposure in the Internet is much more voluntary than in traditional media as it allows horizontal (equal and undistorted) communication with diverse content. OSN can serve as the foundation for “*self-directed networking as a tool for organization, collective action, and the construction of meaning*” (p. 55). It is also described by Giddens (1993) as the process of “dis-embed[ding] and re-embed[ding] social relations across space-time” (p. 41).

At the same time, however, the Internet may also reveal conflicting views of each party. In studies located in Hong Kong, it has been reported that mainland students had difficulty gaining “mutually engaging experiences” in the highly politicized online space, which is full of biased views and anti-Mainland sentiments (Tian, 2017).

Moreover, OSN is also considered as a possible source of intercultural conflict, which is also known as the Echo-chamber effect. It refers to the illusion of being in a vibrant community with frequent communication between a few parties (Scoble & Israel, 2006). This effect appears because all SNS (e.g., Facebook or Instagram) run an information filter process with certain algorithms. These algorithms favor popular stories and offer tailored pages for users,

with news on SNS coming with a built-in confirmation bias so people see only what they believe or prefer. As a result, OSN only presents polarized comments to users and avoids other information sources with different slants and agendas (Dokuka, Koltcov, Koltsova, & Koltsov, 2018).

2.3 The research gap

There is no doubt that OSN has become increasingly popular in interpersonal communication; however, there is no common consensus as to whether and how it affects intercultural friendship development. Based on ICT, the frequency of intergroup contact can reduce prejudice and facilitate the intercultural relationships. However, the present study sets out to investigate whether communication in the virtual space has a similar effect. The following research question is thus proposed:

RQ1. Is there any correlation between the use of online social-networks, number of intercultural friends, and the level of satisfaction with mainland-HK friendship?

Second, although the role of OSN has been examined from different perspectives, there is no consensus among researchers on how OSN affects intercultural friendship development. To better understand the role of OSN, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ2. What role does the instant-messaging platform (IMP) play in the development of mainland-Hong Kong (HK) friendship?

RQ3. What role do social-networking sites (SNS) play in the development of mainland-Hong Kong (HK) friendship?

Moreover, since there has been a rapid growth of tension between mainland-China and Hong Kong after the recent Anti-Extradition Protests, the online space may have become politicalized and amplified the echo-chamber effect. In previous local studies, to my

knowledge, the linkage between intergroup and the individual relationship has not been clearly explored, which leads to the following research question:

RQ4. How do mainland and Hong Kong students perceive and respond to the conflicting views in the SNS?

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

Addressing the research questions, a mixed-method exploratory case study was chosen for two reasons: First, it integrates multiple databases for “methodological triangulation.” Not only can it provide the magnitude or frequency for describing the trends of a large population and offer a general view of different clusters for analyzing the research problem (Creswell, 2009), but mixed methods also allow the researcher to understand the participant’s social world with its multiple facets of the real world (Flick, 2002), as well as the subjective interpretation about how intercultural interaction can convey the meaning of different behaviour (Verma, 1999). Second, quantitative data can help identify a clear boundary of different cases, which allows the researcher to compare the findings with different demographic data and friendship stages.

3.1.1 Exploratory phase

The exploratory phase involved an online self-report survey (see Section 9.3), which aimed to investigate the relationship between the choice of using OSN and friendship-related variables (including the satisfaction level about the quantity and quality of mainland-HK friendship, and the number of mainland/HK friends).

On the other hand, this study examines the impact of OSN at different friendship stages, which were identified by Knapp's relational stage model of friendship development. Knapp's model is one of the most widely adopted models for identifying different friendship stages. It classified friendship into four stages (initiating, experimenting, intensify and integrating), which are

well-defined by detailed descriptions in cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions (Avtgis et al, 1998; Webb & Thompson-Hayes, 2002).

Citations of the interview data are indicated in each excerpt. For example, “ML-A-02” for mainland students (#2) at initiating stage, and “HK-D-03” for Hong Kong students (#3) at the integrating stage.

3.1.2 Explanatory phase

The second phase was the explanatory phase, which involved the face-to-face interview (see Section 9.4). Some sample questions, such as, “Do you think the online social network could facilitate, or inhibit your intercultural communication with intercultural friends, and why?”, “Do you prefer face-to-face communication or online communication?” or “what do you think about the “echo-chamber effect?” were asked to explore how students viewed the impact of OSN on their current mainland-HK friendships.

3.2 Sampling and criteria

All participants were recruited from the authors’ university through the mass email to all students (year two or above). All student participants were required to fulfil the following criteria: (i) being enrolled in a full-time undergraduate or postgraduate programme; (ii) have been living in Hong Kong for more than 12 months; (iii) having experience in using OSN for intercultural communication; and (iv) reporting as having a satisfied level of intercultural communication with Hong Kong students (or “with mainland students” for HK participants). To distinguish mainland sojourners from the regular immigrant, this study defined “mainland students” as those who arrived in Hong Kong less than six months before their programme started.

In the quantitative phase, all students were invited to complete an online survey, which took approximately five minutes to complete. After that, 24 students (12 mainland and 12 Hong Kong students) were randomly selected from the participants to join the interviews.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The quantitative data was collected from a short questionnaire, in which the students reported their most frequently used OSN during intercultural interactions. Their answers were coded manually into two categories: Use/not use the OSN of the other-cultural group. Also, the students reported the number of mainland-HK friends they had, as well as their perceived level of satisfaction with the friendship quality in a 5-point Likert scale. An independent-sampled t-test was performed to determine whether the associated population means were significantly different.

In the semi-structured interviews, participants commented on the role of OSN and shared their experience of using OSN with intercultural friends. An example of an interview question was, “How do you view the role OSN in the development of your current mainland-HK friendship?”

The students were asked to comment on whether and how the echo-chamber effect affected their friendship, as well as the intergroup attitude. Since the student’s sharing may involve some sensitive view or idea, I tried my best to build up a good rapport with interviewees and show my unconditional empathy, so that the students would be less defensive to share their real thought.

After the data collection, a constant comparison approach was used as the analyzing strategy to organize the interview transcripts, where the data collection and analysis were not independent phases, but a continuous cycle (Gasson, 2009). To ensure personal privacy, all informant would be kept strictly anonymous and confidential.

4. FINDING & DISCUSSION

4.1 Correlation between the use of OSN and friendship-related variables

Participants were asked to indicate the number of intercultural friends and their satisfaction levels about the quality and quantity of friendship, while t-test was performed in mainland and HK group to note any differences across the three variables. The results are shown below:

Table 1-1

Mean, Standard Deviations and T-Test results of friendship satisfaction and OSN usage among mainland students (N=53)

	Students using local-OSN		Students without using local-OSN		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Number of intercultural friends	6.3	3.91	4.56	2.60	-1.27
Satisfaction level about the number of intercultural friends	3.5	.830	3.3	.675	-.702
Satisfaction level about the quality of intercultural friendship	3.68	.809	3.7	.675	.057

Note. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$

Table 1-2

Mean, Standard Deviations and T-Test results of intercultural friendship satisfaction and OSN usage among Hong Kong students (N=106)

	Students using mainland- OSN		Students without using mainland-OSN		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Number of intercultural friends	5.43	5.64	3.46	3.78	-2.02*
Satisfaction level about the number of intercultural friends	3.87	.665	3.58	.906	-2.30*
Satisfaction level about the quality of intercultural friendship	3.87	.623	3.43	1.041	-2.73**

Note. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$

From the above tables, statistically significant differences were found only among Hong Kong students (Table 1-2). Those who used mainland-OSN reported having more mainland friends ($N=5.43$) than those who did not ($N=3.46$, $t(92)=-2.03$, $p < .05$). Also, those who used mainland-OSN had higher levels of satisfaction about the number of Hong Kong friends ($N=3.87$) than those who did not ($N=3.58$, $t(104)=-2.11$, $p < .05$). Further, those who used mainland-OSN had higher satisfaction levels of mainland-HK friendship ($N=3.87$) than those who did not ($N=3.43$, $t(103)=-2.73$, $p < .01$). However, no significant difference was found in all three variables among mainland students.

This study partially confirmed the positive effect of using out-group OSN. The findings showed that OSN can help local students have a wider social network with mainlanders. However, it is still not clear how it improved the quality, and how it facilitated the establishment of friendship or more importantly why it did not benefit mainland students.

One of the possible explanations is the length of using OSN. In the survey, all participants were also asked how long they spent using online-communication with mainland friends (“HK friends” for mainland students) in an average day. The result shows that Hong Kong students spent significantly more time using online-communication ($N=2.77$) than mainland students ($N=1.04$, $t(159)=-4.96$, $p<.05$). However, one cannot conclude that the absence of impact is due to an insufficient amount of time using OSN because there is no significant correlation between the “time spent on online-communication” and the above three variables.

Another possible explanation is that mainland and Hong Kong students may use OSN differently, which was explored in the interviews.

4.2 The role of Instant-messaging platform (IMP) in the mainland-HK friendship

4.2.1 Offsetting the cost for friendship-maintenance

In the survey, most mainland ($N=10$, 83.3%) and Hong Kong students ($N=9$, 75%) agreed that IMP played a facilitating role of in helping the students maintain intercultural friendships in various social activities:

I often chat with locals on WhatsApp. Since I live in a hostel and seldom meet local friends, it is important to let us know what others are thinking about with WhatsApp
(ML-A-03)

We seldom meet with each other, but we can find each other at any time we wish using WhatsApp (ML-A-01)

It is very important for keeping contact. You can't meet each other every day, without special reasons. However, you can keep noticing her updates and keep contact (ML-B-02)

Consistent with the literature, IMP enables individuals to sustain social ties with local peers with minimal time-cost. They could keep online-connections and interact with each other at

any time, from anywhere. However, it is worth noting that IMP alone is not effective enough to develop a meaningful relationship; it is often considered a complementary tool to face-to-face interaction for friendship maintenance only.

4.2.2 Less communication anxiety

Other than reducing the time-cost and space restriction, this study also tested whether Bargh's "Poor-Get-Richer" hypothesis existed bringing particular benefits to those with communication anxiety. The result showed that Bargh's hypothesis is correct, where students with higher communication anxiety would be more prefer to communicate with IMP:

FTF makes me so anxious, and I would be careful about if my description is made properly... I feel easier to express myself in IMP, especially some innermost thoughts. It may lead to a quarrel if you speak directly. But the online platform offers me a buffer to think and calm down after receiving messages that make me feel uncomfortable (ML-A-02)

It is easier for me to express myself and explore more topics in WeChat. For example, we can easily share a post in "Moment" with others when you read something interesting. But you would be embarrassed when you can't find common topics with your friends. Also, I feel anxious when making eye-contact (ML-A-03)

I would prefer FTF if I can use my mother-tongue (PTH), However, it is better to type the words in Cantonese as it could allow me to think twice before sending out (HK-D-03)

The above findings were consistent with Rui and Wong's previous study about IMP (2015), which reported that its asynchronous nature offered shelter for people so that they have more time to draft and edit their messages before sending them out. However, this view represents only a minority, where 79% students still preferred FTF for their intercultural communication.

Moreover, it is worth noting that almost all students who preferred using IMP were at the elementary level of friendship (initiating or experimenting stage) only, which indicates the social compensation Bargh's hypothesis may not be applicable to those with advanced friendship.

4.2.3 Face-to-face interaction: The pursuit of high-quality conversation

In the interview, the students were asked whether they would prefer FTF or IMP in intercultural communication contexts. Interestingly, although almost all students acknowledged the timeliness and asynchronous nature of IMP, 75% HK and 67% mainland students were more prefer to have the FTF communication. The most common reason was that non-verbal cues in FTF communication allow students to better comprehend each other:

When I read words, I would also insert my own emotion or feeling inside, and it may easily lead to misunderstanding. For example, you may interpret certain meanings from words, but your friend did not mean them (ML-B-04)

Through FTF communication, you can have more chance to interact and learn how to listen and observe others. You can read more details from her facial expression (ML-B-03)

The Hong Kong students also reported the same idea and shared the limitation of using emojis or affirmative statements:

In the FTF conversation, your friend could give you an answer through facial expressions and gestures. It can also lead to a deeper conversation with more details. However, your image in the IMP is dehumanized, and you cannot fully express your feelings even if you insert an emoji (HK-B-03)

Furthermore, it is reported that face-to-face communication can guarantee authenticity of the meaning:

Everyone has different modes of communication and uses different words to express the same meaning... For example, she would politely “agree” with you, but actually, she does not. In WhatsApp, I could only read the surface meaning from her textual response, whereas it may not represent her real meaning (HK-A-02)

When you text-chatting on a mobile, it is difficult to see what kind of person she is because she can organize and modified words before sending the message.

However, you can see her immediate response during FTF conversation (HK-D-01)

The above findings are consistent with previous communication studies that suggest that implicit ideas are difficult to convey without non-verbal cues (Hambley, O'Neill, & Kline, 2007). It is of particular importance for effective communication in high-context cultures, e.g., Chinese society. In Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory, high / low-context is a measure of how explicit messages are exchanged and how important the context is in communication (Hofstede, 2001). High-context communication often stems from less direct verbal and nonverbal communication, utilizing small communication gestures such as tone of voice, gesture, eye contact, or even silence, and reading into these less direct messages with more meaning (Ramos, 2014). From a cultural point of view, China and Hong Kong are both areas of high-context culture (Wang, Sparks, Lu, & Huang, 2016), where people are used to reading non-verbal messages and do not have enough confidence in comprehending if they solely rely on IMP.

Another specific role of FTF interaction is that it is more likely to develop informal and spontaneous conversation with deeper and wider breadth of self-disclosure:

When you are talking with others, you may end up with an invitation “Are you free tomorrow? Let's have lunch together!” But in OSN, you would either discuss something with others or make an invitation purposively (ML-C-04)

We develop deeper conversation through face-to-face interaction. We can have a more encouraging atmosphere, which makes us happier and share more unplanned topics. It is completely different from using IMP (ML-B-03)

The deepest conversation must be through face-to-face... [using IMP] she may not answer immediately. You may already lose interest when you receive her response an hour later... (HK-D-01)

The above finding, therefore, does not support the argument that the online environment is a safer place for more intimate and unprompted self-disclosure (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais, 2009). In contrast, this study revealed that unprompted or insightful conversation only happens in FTF conversation.

4.3 The role of social-networking sites (SNS) in the mainland-HK friendship

4.3.1 Gain a deeper understanding of each other

This study asked students about how they view the role of SNS in promoting mainland-HK friendship at the individual level. Among all participants, over half of all mainland students had accounts in local SNS (Facebook or Instagram), while 42% of Hong Kong students had mainland SNS (Weibo, Friends' Circle in WeChat or Instagram). Many students (N=12, 50%) agreed that SNS could help them gain more understanding and explore commonality between each other:

Facebook allows us to talk and deepen our friendship. I could know what they are thinking about, or what common interest we shared (ML-A-03)

If you don't join, you can hardly find a common topic with your friends...SNS can offer you new information continuously so that you can keep finding new common topics (ML-B-02)

I learnt that most Hong Kong students would like to visit Japan and Taiwan, as

most photos in Facebook were taken there.... I could talk more about travelling in Japan or Taiwan when we meet (ML-C-02)

Unlike IMP, the above excerpts show that SNS performs a different function in friendship development. It allows for unexpected discoveries, which helps students explore and identify commonalities and differences. It may further benefit their FTF interactions as it allows students to better prepare for potential value conflicts.

4.3.2 Hidden views of others and unexpected cultural shock

At the same time, SNS could also reveal the hidden views of others on different socio-political topics, which sometimes revealed themselves in a series of cultural shocks:

In Facebook, she would share discriminatory posts against mainland Chinese. For example, they said that SARS is an epidemic created by the mainland to deliberately erode and destroy Hong Kong. It really made me uncomfortable (ML-A-03)

In SNS, you can know how they comment on particular issues. Their posts are not only for you, but publicly accessible. You can more or less understand how they view those issues (ML-C-02)

Similarly, the Hong Kong students also experienced cultural shock when using the mainland SNS. For example, a local student expressed his surprise after reading his friend's thread (Celebration of National Day) in WeChat:

We have never talked about any political issue, and I never realized that he is so patriotic.....It makes me feel we come from different worlds. No matter how close we are, I feel that we can never fully integrate with each other (HK-C-03)

Beyond the bright side of SNS, this study showed that SNS also revealed conflicting views on different controversial topics. Previous literature suggested that the Internet facilitated honest discussion between partners and helped users express their true-self without taking face-saving

actions (Tosun, 2012; Triandis, 1995). Thus, people are more likely to seek authenticity and self-disclose (Bond & Smith, 1998) in digital platforms, whereas the most authentic views are not always welcomed by others.

In the daily FTF interaction between Chinese, such sensitive viewpoints were hardly heard. It is because the Chinese tend to keep their social desirable image when responding to sensitive issues (Triandis & Suh, 2002). Therefore, when using SNS, they may experience a shock when they know about another's real thoughts. However, it may turn out to be advantageous to them because they can uncover potential conflicts in a harmless way without going through the trials and tribulations of real interactions.

4.3.3 Platform to show care and support

Studies have suggested that the “like” button in Facebook can help people indicate the awareness of presentations or to express a preference on posts (Wong, 2012). This study showed a similar finding, where students tend to show their care and emotional support via one simple click:

You could “see” their daily life, and they could “see” yours. You could also reply to their message immediately and build up some intimacy (ML-C-04)

It can help you keep your current friendship... When they post a new thread, you can give some feedback and have a short chat... Without SNS, you may gradually become strangers (HK-C-03)

A simple click on “like” can express our emotional support. Though this “response” is one-size-fit-all and doesn't mean much, it shows that I am always aware of others' updates (HK-C-02)

Students also showed their care through timely responses and personal sharing in their friends' SNS posts:

I replied to every IG (Instagram) story she posted, and I reply to my best friend.

Otherwise, I only read (ML-D-03)

One time, I read her IG post, which is about the stress of mainland students, and she felt surprised. She showed curiosity about our feeling, and I have shared many experiences in her post as well..... These details have brought us close together (ML-B-03)

Different from previous literatures, OSN did not activate latent friends and expand social networks of students; rather, it provided an easy and convenient platform to show emotional support and care to others without consuming much time and effort. Emotional support in SNS is not a new finding; however, most researchers have not reported that it plays a crucial role in friendship development. Ye (2006), for example, suggested that most online friendships rely on strong real-world connections. In contrast, OSN could only maintain a weak social tie, which enables people to effectively get information and intensive emotional support.

In this study, however, SNS did not work alone but served only as an extension of the current social network. The superficial, but timely online support (e.g., emoji, “like,” or simple text feedback) could create a sense of social presence, which proved to be important in building social trust (Jiang, Rashid and Wang, 2019). To students, weak social ties are not useless in friendship development but perform a different function. They serve to bridging social capital, which is particularly valuable in providing informational support to members and expanding their horizons (Guo, Li, & Ito, 2014).

4.4 Echo-chamber effect in the SNS

The literature suggests that SNS increase the diversity of opinions, and take the “echo-chamber” to its extreme by showing only similar views or news threads that the audience wants to see (Chan, Chow, & Fu, 2019). Addressing this concern, this study aims to

examine whether echo-chamber effect had any influence and, if so, how students responded to it.

4.4.1 Views of Hong Kong students: Cultural assimilation in the “Echo-chamber”

Regarding communication at the intergroup level, the majority of Hong Kong students (61%) held a more negative view of SNS and were aware of the echo-chamber effect:

You become less open-minded [if you stick with the SNS]. People are more likely to join the corresponding SNS or chatting group with similar views. They aggressively argue and interrogate opposing points of view It is full of bias on Facebook. For example, when people do something bad, the audience says “He must be a mainlander” (HK-C-03)

When there was a mainland-HK conflict, the online comments become offensive and involve homophonic curses or dirty words.... mainlanders get around the firewall and initiated the online flaming. Both sides respond fast and intensify the conflict (HK-D-01)

During the Umbrella Movement in 2014, all of us changed our profiles. Some mainland students with a FaceBook account may have felt that they are not welcomed, and perceived threats or hostility against us (HK-C-01)

The above findings show that SNS created an echo-chamber and intensified social conflict in two ways. First, the war of words between bloggers or the audience may have strengthened biases at the intergroup level. It also dampened the mainland-HK relationship through online flaming. Second, self-expression in SNS may have induced unnecessary wariness among mainland students and reduced their motivation to make local friends. The interview also showed that they were highly aware of “filtered information” and “exaggerated news” in the SNS, regardless of whether it was a mainland news report or democratic propaganda

(HK-B-03; HK-C-02; HK-D-03). They would deliberately explore views from the opposite side, even if it would make them feel very uncomfortable.

However, only students with advanced friendships showed an awareness of the “echo-chamber effect.” The students at elementary friendship levels (Level A & B) tended to hold optimistic views. For example, they would consider SNS as a platform for cultural assimilation and highlighted the influence of uncensored Internet:

The more you use OSN, the easier it is to integrate. Internet censorship is serious, but mainlanders can use Facebook and access everything here in Hong Kong, such as the Tiananmen event or other sensitive news about mainland China. It opens up a new world for them and they know more information that their mainland teachers would not teach (HK-B-02)

I think they will gradually assimilate with us... If they use Hong Kong OSN, they can learn Hong Kong culture and develop a similar mindset to ours (HK-A-02)

In the above excerpts, Hong Kong students expected that the uncensored online content could let their mainland counterparts learn the unfiltered “truth,” which helped gradually assimilate their thoughts and values to the local community. This optimistic assumption may be because the Hong Kong students were lack of experience in managing value conflicts, which made them underestimate the emotional challenges they would face in the process.

4.4.2 View of mainland students: A “reminder” of being open-mindedness

In the survey, 58% mainland students did not think that SNS would affect their willingness to integrate into the local community. Similar to Hong Kong students, however, mainland students were also aware of the “echo-chamber” effect of SNS, but respond differently:

You must develop critical thinking about it... even if you did not learn it in SNS, you may still need to experience cultural shock elsewhere during four years of study. It

is not about the OSN, but about yourself (ML-C-02)

I feel uncomfortable when I read the news or browse local websites like HK-Golden or Apple Daily... Although I never click on them, it still reminds me to see if those online rumor has really happened. Also, I could learn more about how others view China (ML-C-04)

These excerpts show that the mainland students realized the free availability of information in Hong Kong and the diverse views in the uncensored SNS. However, they felt uncomfortable when reading hostile messages from what they perceived to be biased media. Unlike the local's optimistic expectation, there was no evidence that the SNS encouraged mainland students to actively explore the diverse view in the uncensored Internet. From the students' sharing, however, the echo-chamber effect did not lead to any intercultural conflicts or affect mainland-HK friendships at the individual level. Compared with Hong Kong students, the mainland students considered it as a "reminder" to keep an open-mind and be tolerant of others.

The above emphasis on keeping an open-mind may be due to the encouraging attitudes of their families. In this study, the mainland students reported that they frequently kept contact with their family members via WeChat or Weibo. Studies have often considered "frequent contacts with home-culture" as an inhibiting factor of acculturation since it saturates their social needs (Chen, 2013), strengthens their home-cultural identity and prevents them from deep integration into the host-community (Ellison et al., 2007; Kim, 2007). However, this finding shows that their family plays an encouraging role in intercultural interaction because their family members also appreciated Hong Kong's cultural reputation (ML-A-02; ML-C-01), or they may have also been critical of some mainland government policies (ML-B-03). Another possible reason is that traditional Chinese culture still thrives in Hong Kong, although Hong Kong is considered an international city with a hybrid culture of East and West. From the Chinese viewpoint, therefore, integration into the local community was not considered a unidirectional

assimilation process, where the Chinese cultural identity would remain. As a result, the family had less resistance towards the change of cultural identity of their children.

5. CONCLUSION

This study illustrated that both IMP and SNS are crucial for students' maintenance and development of intercultural friendship; however, they are still supplementary tools that served as an extended platform of intercultural interaction from the real world. Their main function was to strengthen the existing intercultural friendship, rather than build up or establish a new relationship with others. Similar to Chen (2016), who reported the shifting importance of the Internet and other factors at different friendship stages, this study deepens our understanding of the impact of IMPs and SNS on a broader scale, on both individual and intergroup levels.

At the individual level, this study revealed that IMP could serve as a platform which allowed students to send a message any time, from anywhere. It built a sense of presence awareness and offered a greater feeling of closeness in one's friendships. Moreover, the asynchronous nature of IMP allowed students to better express themselves through messages as they could draft and edit them carefully before sending them out. In the students' view, however, IMP just played a supplementary role in their intercultural communication because they could not convey non-verbal information, which acted as a hindrance to effective communication in high-context Chinese culture.

SNS also contributed to the development of mainland-HK friendship. They served as a platform for students to (i) seek common interests; (ii) show care and concern for others; and (iii) to explore hidden views of others, which are difficult to express in face-to-face communication. These characteristics of SNS can enhance interaction in the physical world, as well as prepare students for culture shock in advance.

At the intergroup level, both local and mainland students agreed that SNS may form an echo-chamber and polarize opinions when there is overt mainland-Hong Kong conflict in society. However, most students (N=13, 54.1%) did not think that it would affect their current mainland-HK friendship. In general, mainland students were more confident in managing cultural diversity with more open-mindedness. Local students, in contrast, tended to take a dominating approach and expected that mainland students would gradually assimilate with the local values and beliefs after accessing full and uncensored information on the Internet.

The interview responses revealed that IMP and SNS perform different functions in mainland-HK friendship. The quantitative survey showed that the local students seemed to use OSN more than mainlanders. Those who used mainland OSN had a higher satisfaction level of quantity and quality of mainland-HK friendship, as well as the number of mainland friends, whereas no significant difference was found in the mainland group. Although Hong Kong students were found to spend more hours on OSN, the length of time did not have a significant correlation with the student's satisfaction levels of friendship quality and quantity.

It is plausible that their online communication behaviour mediated relationships between the OSN and friendship-related outcomes. During the interview, some mainland students (N=4, 33.3%) reported that they only engage passively in OSN. Although they said they had the Facebook or Instagram account, they never posted anything. This may be because Facebook was not their core social media platform; most of their friends were not able to use it as it is blocked in mainland China. Also, they would not be able to use it after they graduate and return to the mainland. Thus, they thought that it is meaningless to post and manage a temporary OSN, just for keeping a basic connection with acquaintances. As a result, mainland students only play the role of a "passive engaged audience," rather than a full participant. Also, they were concerned about Internet censorship. While local students were more likely to freely

express their views on sensitive issues, the mainland students tend to hide their views because mainland China has strict Internet censorship, which trained them to exercise self-censorship.

6. IMPLICATION

This study makes several important theoretical and practical contributions. First, it contributes to the literature on friendship development between virtual and physical worlds by examining how students made use of SNS and IMP to develop a friendship in both the virtual and physical world. Second, it contributes to the paucity of local studies on the echo-chamber effect by exploring how mainland and Hong Kong students viewed and showed awareness of similar and conflicting views in the SNS.

Aside from the theoretical contributions, this study also provides significant insights into mainland and local students regarding how they can effectively use SNS and IMP for friendship development. Moreover, universities and student support units may find our study useful in terms of increasing students' awareness of the echo-chamber effect and preparing students for managing diverse views and cultural difference.

7. LIMITATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Although the present study has yielded findings that have both practical and research implications, several limitations should be noted.

First, this study is conducted in a unique school setting that is characterized by both bilingual and hybrid-cultural context. It does not aim to generate any “one-size-fit-all” findings. Therefore, the findings can serve as only a reference for future studies. Second, this study recruited only students who reported as having local or mainland friends. Thus, students who had difficulties in making intercultural friends were not included. Further studies in this area may examine those who failed to establish any friendship with local peers, while its findings could serve as a supplement to this study. Third, this study did not explore the online

communication behaviour or the design of the various OSN in detail. Since the interview responses showed that online communication behaviour and OSN design was influential, future research may wish to take these factors into further consideration.

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Chapter 7: Conclusion: Where do we go from here

The present research sought to answer the core question: “Why could some mainland students develop close-friendship with local peers (or vice-versa), but not others?” It extended Knapp’s relationship development model (Knapp et al, 2014) by exploring the perceptions of students from different cultural backgrounds.

To my knowledge, this is the first study that incorporates multiple constructs from the Social-ecological model. Theoretically, this study has incorporated mainland-HK friendship into the field of intercultural communication and friendship development and provides empirical evidence for doing so using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The first three articles (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) adopted a mixed-method design starting with a self-reported survey, which extracted patterns using statistics according to specific themes in different chapters. The quantitative data were then triangulated and explored in depth through semi-structured interviews. The following two articles (Chapter 5 and 6) adopted qualitative approaches, which addressed the context of university and online-social networks.

7.1 What have we learned, and why does it matter?

To summarize what we have learned in this thesis requires answering two questions. First, what are the key findings in the substantive chapters? Second, what are their implications and limitations? After working through these questions in each chapter, this concluding chapter zooms out to consider the larger picture and discussing what different studies have taught us and why it matters.

Chapter 2: Overall description: friendship, language competence, L2 WTC and demographic variables

The opening chapter offered an overview of the mainland-HK friendship by examining different friendship-related variables, including (i) the number of mainland/HK friendships;

(ii) the satisfaction level of friendships; and (iii) the level of friendship. Addressing the core question, this chapter confirmed the importance of L2 WTC in developing mainland-HK friendship, while it exerted a different influence on mainland and local students.

The results showed that L2 WTC is correlated with the depth of mainland-HK friendships among mainland students. By contrast, for local students, L2 WTC is more related to the breadth of the social network. The interviews revealed that both local and mainland students would speak Putonghua when they interact with each other. As a result, the locals' WTC of speaking Putonghua became the key to initiate friendship, while mainland students could still make local friends without speaking any Cantonese. However, their WTC of speaking Cantonese is still useful to indicate their respect to local culture, which serves as the foundation for deepening friendship with local peers.

Moreover, the interviews further revealed that L2 proficiency and intercultural experience did not help students achieve higher friendship levels directly, but through they would have positive impact on L2 WTC by reducing communication anxiety of individuals, while the prior intercultural experience could prepare the individual's openness to other cultures.

The study in Chapter 2 offered a preliminary view regarding which variables or directions need more exploration. Language differences, for instance, were found to have more impact on intercultural communication anxiety, rather than communication effectiveness. At the personal level, however, this study did not examine what challenges are perceived by students at different friendship stages, and how they overcame the perceived challenges in real practice. These were explored in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3: How intercultural friendships form

To distil the successful experience of mainland-HK friendship development, this chapter investigated the students' perceived challenges at the beginning stage of friendship, and how

they reacted during uncomfortable interactions. Moreover, it explored how students conceptualized friendship differently shaped by their sociocultural background, which often led directly to intercultural conflict (Huang, 2008).

The survey showed that language difference, cultural difference and lacking common topics were perceived by both mainland and local students as three major challenges, but with a different priority. Consistent with the finding in Chapter 2, the host-language proficiency of mainland students does not serve as the communication barrier. The interview revealed that it is because most local students would accommodate them and speak Putonghua. However, the mainland students still have high level of communication anxiety and were hesitant to join any Cantonese-speaking event. To Hong Kong students, however, the linkage between language proficiency and L2 WTC seems to be less significant. Their language choice is more audience-centric that they would still try to speak Putonghua to show their respect to others, even though they do not have much confidence in Putonghua.

The interview also examined how cultural difference is perceived and reflected in their social interaction. The findings showed that mainland and Hong Kong students have very different expectations on what a friend or good student should behave. It is mainly reflected in the incompatible working style, classroom manner and value of money, while most of them originated from the underlying conflict of cultural dimensions between mainland China and Hong Kong. Addressing the perceived cultural and value differences, both mainland and local students tend to avoid any sensitive topic and remain loyal to their own views, instead of engaging in a direct discussion with others.

Furthermore, this study revealed how students seek common topics with peers who grew up in another culture, which was particularly highlighted by students as a challenging task in the survey. The interviews revealed that when the students applied their successful experience in intra-cultural friendships, which sought commonality through shared experiences or favoured

pop-culture, this method simply magnified the cultural differences. Instead, students with successful mainland-HK friendships tended to choose topics from future-oriented and task-oriented issues.

It is worth noting that the contextual factors, such as the university or classroom-setting was seldom highlighted in the students' conversations with each other. However, previous literatures frequently reported that a lack of opportunities to interact is the main barrier of mainland-HK friendship establishment (Chiu, 2014; Zeng, 2006). This is probably because only those students with a satisfying level of mainland-HK friendships were invited to participate in this study, yet those students already had ample opportunity to interact with each other. However, the impact of different contexts in friendship development remains unexplored.

To address this limitation, Chapters 5 and 6 further explored the contextual factors of friendship development, in particular how mainland-HK friendships grow in the university and online-context.

Chapter 4: How intercultural friendship grows

Similar to chapter 2 and 3, this chapter was an extension of how students interact with each other and develop friendship successfully. However, this chapter did not focus on only friendship formation, but rather compared students' perceptions at different stages.

The literature on friendship studies has suggested that the role of influential factors vary across different friendship stages (Chen 2016; Sias et al, 2008), and the same experience may be interpreted differently by students with different levels of intercultural experience. To explore the dynamic nature of intercultural friendship (Zhu, 2012), therefore, this chapter aimed to explore how different factors are perceived by students at different friendship stages.

The survey results revealed that cultural difference and seeking common topics were still considered as the two main factors across all stages, while this chapter further revealed the shifting role of different factors. Language difference, for example, played a crucial role only at the beginning stage, and its importance faded away gradually. By contrast, the importance of propinquity was less recognized by students at the beginning, yet it became more vital when the friendships grew.

Moreover, the qualitative interview stepped forward and revealed three main patterns of mainland-HK friendship evolution: (i) from seeking similarity to exploring differences; (ii) from showing a desirable image to the vulnerable self, and (iii) from multicultural identities to the melting pot.

Consistent with SPT, the sharing of deep secrets, self-vulnerability or private issues were considered as facilitating factors of friendship advancement, especially when the friendship grew to a certain level. The question is, when, why, and under what circumstances the students were more likely to express themselves. The findings showed that the contextual environment plays an important role in establishing a “relational identity” and blurs the cultural boundary of individuals. Non-academic activities, such as overseas exchange, sports or volunteer work, were frequently reported as providing an inclusive atmosphere for students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Overall, personal issues were discussed more by students as they brought challenges to individual interactions directly; however, contextual factors appeared to go unrecognized. However, they were the key to determining whether and how students interacted with each other. There was a need to explore what environment is considered as “desirable” for intercultural interaction, and how it is created. Thus, the subsequent chapters focused on (i) the university setting; and (ii) the online social-network; which are generally agreed as being the two main platforms of intercultural interaction among students.

Chapter 5: The role of the university in the development of mainland-HK friendship

Chapters 3 and 4 had a rather narrow focus on each individuals' perceptions, yet little is known about the manner in which the individual and environmental dimensions interact with one another to co-contribute to mainland-HK friendship development. This chapter, therefore, attempted to address the research gap by exploring the role of the university and teachers. The findings highlighted the importance of building relational identity in successful mainland-HK friendship, and how it grows in different school activities.

At the institutional level, students appreciated the university's effort encouraging intercultural interactions; however, most university-led activities did were unrelated to how students keep contact afterwards. The Cantonese-learning course was welcomed by mainland students as it could improve their host-language proficiency and reduce their communication anxiety before intercultural contact in the real world, yet it did not guarantee that they would have opportunities to practise what they learned.

In contrast, the activities that provided a high level of propinquity greatly facilitated the formation of relational identities and developed a sense of psychological closeness with each other. Not only did it blur the host-guest boundary, but it also allowed the students to gain more understanding about each other during collaboration.

At the classroom level, students appreciated the lecturers' attempts at encouraging intercultural communication (i.e., classroom discussion or mandatory grouping). However, it forced students to face the language barrier without enough preparation and left a negative experience for future interactions outside the classroom.

This chapter provided supplementary information of the interaction context at different friendship stages, which were largely overlooked in chapter 4 and 5 as individual communication was stressed. This chapter addressed the research gap and showed how

propinquity plays a vital role in building up a new relational identity to break the bottleneck of mainland-HK friendship. This chapter reconfirmed the importance of how influential factors vary across different stages.

This chapter revealed that, in the students' view, most university-led activity may not be so effective, because their limited resources only supported one-shot events in most cases. The successful mainland-HK friendship was more dependent on whether students took the initiative to join student-led activities or school activities which could ensure the opportunity of frequent and regular interaction for establishing a new relational identity.

Chapter 6: The role of online social-networks in the development of mainland-HK friendship

This chapter focused on the communication context and examined social interactions in the digital world, which has rarely been investigated in local friendship studies. The findings showed that the students with successful mainland-HK friendship would make use of the Internet effectively for strengthening their existing friendship.

First, the students would make use of IMP to solidify offline connections. Due to the synchronic nature of the Internet, IMP is able to build up a sense of “presence awareness,” which allows students to keep contact with each other anytime and anywhere.

Second, the students would make use of SNS to explore common interests or sensitive topics that may reveal the value and cultural differences, so that the students could better prepare for the conversation topics in real interactions.

Moreover, it was surprising to find that local students took more advantage of OSN in terms of making more intercultural friends and higher levels of friendship satisfaction than mainland students did. The interviews also revealed how social norms were incorporated into students' online-communication behaviour, which may account for the unexpected quantitative findings.

Also, both groups of students were aware of the echo-chamber effect and the impact of biased media, while mainland students showed more confidence in maintaining a balanced view and keeping themselves in a neutral position.

Overall, the functions and the importance of OSN are well recognized by students as strengthening the existing friendships in the physical world. It helped students gain mutual understanding and offered virtual proximity; however, face-to-face interaction was still shown to be irreplaceable.

7.2 Limitations

Several limitations on the scope of this research need to be kept in mind when the results and findings are interpreted and discussed.

7.2.1 Transferability

As one of the few such studies conducted in a non-Western context, the thesis enriched the literatures about friendship studies by providing a unique setting that is characterized by both bilingual and hybrid-cultural context. Yet, this thesis does not aim to generate any “one-size-fit-all” findings. It employs the notion of transferability, instead of generalizability. In other words, the findings could only be transferable to those populations with similar cultural and educational settings to those in Hong Kong. And because all participants were recruited from only one university, the findings may not perfectly suit to students in other university contexts.

7.2.2 Limitations of the data collection tool

The data was collected through a questionnaire survey and interview. They largely relied on students’ memory recall about the previous experience, which may not be clear enough sometimes. Addressing this concern, I would keep aware of the possible key experience and invite the students to express more details from different perspectives. For example, when

mainland students reported that he perceived a cultural difference when his local roommate would close the browser when he walked behind. I would ask “What website was he reading?” or “What do you think about the reason for his action?” so that the interviewee could describe the issue, feeling and explain their subjective perception in more details.

7.2.3 Limitations of naturalistic design

Although I have tried my best to build up a good rapport with interviewees, it cannot be avoided that some people may show a social desirable image, or express in a certain way to conform what they expected researchers would like to know. and The survey and interviews showed that some other factors, such as prior intercultural experiences or personality traits, may have influenced students’ intercultural friendships. However, these factors were not deeply explored as they were beyond the scope of this thesis. Addressing this concern, I have tried my best to develop a good rapport with interviewees and show my empathy. I also kept in mind to avoid guiding or shaping their answers unintentionally during the interview.

7.3 Implications

7.3.1 Theoretical implications

Linking Knapp’s Relational Stage Model with other friendship theories. As discussed in the literature review, a major problem with previous friendship theories and models is that most of them were built on the discussion of particular personal or contextual factors. However, it is generally agreed that friendship development is not a simple straightforward concept, but divided into different stages with various concerns (Derlega et al., 2008; Sias et al., 2008). Therefore, this thesis adopted Knapp’s Relational Stage Model and offered new insights into how different friendship stages link with different theories and influential factors as perceived by students.

First, it is observed that ICT and SET could better illustrate the students' concern at the beginning of friendship. As discussed in Chapters two to four, the successful formation and development of mainland-HK friendship is primarily attributed to language and socio-cultural variables. This research identified the possible facilitative factors, namely, willingness to communicate, language anxiety, language confidence and competence to seek common topics; and possible debilitating variables such as incompatible working style, living habits values or beliefs about socio-political issues. These factors are more about the prediction of the time-cost, effort, and barrier in building a closer relationship.

In contrast, SIT is more plausible to explain intercultural friendships at the advanced level, especially for the establishment of relational identities during regular and frequent interactions towards shared goal(s), is the major determinant of promoting mainland-HK friendship (see Chapter 4 and 5).

This finding enriches the literature of friendship development among Chinese, which suggested that the melting-pot approach is more preferable for developing a new co-established social identity, instead of multiculturalism, at the advanced friendship level. It also foreshadows potential future studies that may adopt a more comprehensive Relational Stage Model from the perspective of intercultural communication.

Revisit the Cultural Distance Theory

In acculturation studies, the concept of cultural distance is often incorporated into the host- and home-cultural orientation. It is generally agreed that those who are from countries with a relatively homogeneous culture encounter fewer challenges in socio-cultural adaptation (Berry, 2006). Due to the low cultural distance between mainland and Hong Kong, the cultural difference between two groups has often been underestimated (Ma, 2015). Moreover, most studies implicitly assume that non-local people are socially vulnerable (Sherry et al., 2010);

The findings of this thesis, however, these assumptions are not entirely applicable to the mainland students in the Hong Kong context.

This thesis extended the discussion of Yu and Zhang (2016) about “why Hong Kong is more foreign than a foreign country”. Chapter 3 and 4 showed that it is triggered by a sense of falling short: failing to meet their expectations or holding similar values, such as what a “meaningful university life” should be”, or what “good time-management” means, and how they lead to the intercultural conflict. It is also reflected in students’ socio-political views about some sensitive topics, such as the mainland-HK relationship or the sensitive identity of “HongKonger”. Some values or views were considered unquestionable and were taken for granted among “ingroup members”.

The above value and cultural differences as reported probably resulted from Hong Kong being British colony for over 150 years. Its culture was shaped by British culture and values, and formed a specific hybrid culture of east and west. Although the sovereignty was returned to China in 1997, Hong Kong still holds a specific cultural or value of its own. At the same time, the main Chinese values of “family solidarity”, “courtesy” or “saving face” carry significant weight in Hong Kong culture, which makes mainland students underestimate and unprepared for the cultural differences between each other.

However, the findings further revealed that the impact of cultural difference is largely magnified due to a lack of preparation before the intercultural contact; this impact was more significant in the mainland students’ group and created an intense culture shock.

The future research needs to be very cautious regarding the cultural differences of participants, while the findings also lead us to rethink about the assumption of Hofstede’s Cultural Distance Theory, where less cultural distance does not always mean less conflict. Some missing puzzles, such as the centre-periphery tension within one ethnic group, may remain unexplored in his

cultural-dimension framework. It is the key to understand why the people with sibling cultural background, such as British and Scottish, or mainland Chinese and Taiwanese, would express aversion towards each other.

7.3.2 Practical Implications

At the individual level: Optimal self-disclosure and conflict management. This thesis shifted the discussion of intergroup contact from quantity to quality. In the past, ICT is frequently highlighted as the key to reduce intergroup bias, prejudice and discrimination, and hence improve the intercultural relationship. However, the findings in Chapter 2 and 3 showed that more contact is not always better. The key is whether the students could seek commonality between themselves and others by focusing on task-oriented and future-oriented topics instead of following successful experiences they have had with intra-cultural peers.

The above findings enriched the previous literature about the negative experience of self-disclosure. For example, Levontin and Yom-Tov about online behavior (2017) reported that the negative self-disclosing experience is due to the unexpected response that shows no association with the likelihood of the self-disclosing person himself. This study, in this regard, stepped forward and further revealed what kinds of self-disclosure could benefit, or erode the friendship between mainland and local students. It provided the key to students by seeking common topics for intercultural friendship, instead of blindly following the successful experiences they have had with intra-cultural peers.

Second, the findings in Chapter 4 revealed the importance of how students manage intercultural conflict. In the past, most socio-psychological studies have highlighted the importance of improving mutual understanding for reducing intergroup biases and communication anxiety; however, it cannot resolve every conflict, especially those that originate from deep-rooted beliefs, values or world-view differences. Chapter 6, for example,

explains how the students manage the intercultural conflict with two main strategies: (i) they stopped sharing when they received any signal of escalating conflict; (ii) they sought common consensus and tried to reduce disparities or tensions. Compared with the importance of self-expression, it is equally important to let students know when to stop the conversation and be patient.

The above finding highlighted the importance of “avoidance”, which was often considered an ineffective strategy that results in unproductive outcomes since it did not address the conflict at all (Rahim, 2002). It is particularly important for interpersonal interaction in the Chinese context, since avoidance is seen as a non-confrontational resolving strategy (Hofstede, 2001) and associated with relational harmony and face-saving, which could better fit the expectation of Chinese collective culture (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

At the teacher’s level: Insights on L2 learning outside the classroom. In Chapter 2, the role of host-language proficiency, language anxiety and confidence were reviewed, yet their importance was found to be different from Western studies, which reported that language barriers would isolate non-local students from the host-community and reduce their interactions with host students (Mori, 2000; O’Reilly, Ryan, & Hickey, 2010). By contrast, Chapter 2 revealed that the real limitation of intercultural communication is the lack of confidence when students use their L2 rather than the communication barrier brought by the poor proficiency of each other’s language. The interview further revealed the integrative role of learning host-language as the symbol of showing respect to the local culture. Yet the students’ awareness of the integrative role of the host language needs to be improved as most mainland students tend to seek the comfort of their native tongue and result in low motivation in learning Cantonese.

The above findings are consistent with Clément's study about willingness to communicate in L2 (Clement et al, 2003), while this study further supported the integrative approach of L2 learning and called for the need of revisiting the traditional language teaching approach.

In traditional view, L2 teachers often pay attention to micro aspects of learning, emphasizing accurate grammar, spelling or being a 'purist' of English speaking (Sung, 2010). However, this study suggested that L2 teachers show more concern about the integrative role of L2 and the macro-aspects of learning, such as how to overcome the communication anxiety, express oneself in real interactions, and realize what social benefit the L2 could bring (Ran, 2001). As Gardner (2007) mentioned, it is important to build students' interest in learning L2, "in order to interact with valued members of the other community and/or to learn more about that community" (Gardner, 2007). In other words, second language learning is not only for communication, but to fulfil social purposes by showing respect for the other's culture and builds a more positive atmosphere for intercultural interaction. L2 learning, therefore, is not only grounded in the textbook or classroom, but socially grounded through interactions with others.

Second, the findings lie its practical implications for the curriculum. In Chapter 4, it is reported that the slang and mixed-code of languages could blur the original identity difference and characterize a common "post-90s youth" identity, in contrast to the "conservative adult". It is consistent with Sung's view about the linkage between language and Youth's identity, which suggested that mixed-code serves as a specific marker of youth's linguistic identity. Thus, they should be adopted in English teaching in Hong Kong, rather than being shunned at all costs (Sung, 2010).

At the university level: Establishment of relational identity. The present study highlights the needs and difficulties of local students in the field of intercultural friendship, which has rarely been mentioned in previous studies. The findings in Chapter 2 showed that Hong Kong

students perform worse than mainland students in building mainland-HK friendships in terms of their satisfaction level, as well as more reported local friends. Echoing to Chapter 2's finding, Chapter 5 further showed that the concerns and needs of local students are largely ignored by the university management due to limited resources.

Second, the findings show that it would be better to support student-led activities or events, rather than being directly involved in organizing one-shot activities. Most previous studies suggested that the school should allocate more resources and play a more aggressive role in facilitating intercultural communication. However, this study showed that the indirect support to the student union or loosely organized activities (e.g., overseas exchange or mentoring programmes) are more preferred by students, because student-led activities allow the students to meet regularly and work towards a shared goal, or strengthen relational identity through experiencing similar difficulties and challenges. The key to the effectiveness is not what the event is, but rather whether it can help students build up an inclusive identity (relational identity) and blur host-guest boundaries.

Chapter 5 provide university managers with implications on how to establish the relational identity through well-planned school activities, including: (i) creating opportunity of collaboration towards the same goal; (ii) helping participants keep contact afterwards; (iii) Highlight what benefit they could bring to students, especially for attracting more local students to join; and (iv) Shaping students' expectation on each other in advance.

Third, the university should increase awareness of the cultural differences of mainland students. This study revealed that most mainland students treated Hong Kong as a part of China and underestimated the adaptation challenges before they came. Thus, to enhance psychological preparedness, universities should provide induction programmes about cultural differences and the most frequent perceived challenges based on student feedback so that incoming students are better prepared in advance for possible culture shock.

At the societal level: Better support to the universities. Another significance of this research lies its practical implications for the government. Previous studies have suggested that gaining local support and promoting intercultural friendship can create a sense of belonging and social-tie with local peers. To the society at large, it could retain more non-local talents to stay after they graduate and enhances the quality of our population. The findings of this study can help the government provide better support and create a more culturally integrated atmosphere across institutions, such as encouraging more integration activities for international staff about their common interests, or buddy programme for new international staff, which facilitates the establishment of relational identities and mutual affection between Mainland and Hong Kong students, and prevent the outflow of talent.

Chapter 8: Bibliography

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Chapter 9 Appendices

9.1 Information Sheet and Consent Form (Template)

INFORMATION SHEET

From strangers to friends: How intercultural friendships develop between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Dr. YU, Baohua and conducted by Nr. LEUNG, Yick Wah, who are staff / students of the Department of English Language Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

The introduction of the research

To better understand how the Mainland-HK friendship develops, this study aims to invite those students who report as having a close Mainland-HK friendship to share their successful experience in the qualitative interview. Of particular interest in Internet usage, this study will also investigate how individuals respond to the challenges and develop their intercultural friendship through online and offline communication.

In this study, all participants are required to fulfil the following criteria: (i) Being enrolled in the Full-time Undergraduate or Post-graduate programme; (ii) have been living in Hong Kong for more than 12 months; (iii) Arrive in Hong Kong less than 6 months before the programme starts; (iv) consider that their intercultural friendship is more than “acquaintance” level; and (v) the friendship is not a romantic relationship. It is assumed that students with study period over 12 months would have rich experience of social-interaction that offer sufficient data for analysis. By contrast, the restriction of romantic friendship can ensure that students’ reported experience would have a less emotional bias.

The methodology of the research

This study will invite the student (Year 2 or above) through the social network of the principal investigator or the referral of interviewees. 12 to 24 participants to attend the qualitative interview according to the corresponding self-reported friendship stages. The ratio of Mainland and Hong Kong student will be 1 to 1.

During the study, the participant will fill in a survey, which includes social-demographic information, self-reported friendship network and the online-communication in Mainland-HK friendship. Also, they will be asked to evaluate their L2 proficiency and willingness to

communicate (WTC). Lastly, they will be invited to recall the memory of their best friend in Mainland-HK friendship, and select which statement of the friendship description, which can best fit their current Mainland-HK friendship.

Second, the participant will attend a semi-structured interview, which includes the perceived challenges of intercultural friendship formation, the perceived influence of factors at different friendship stages and how their WTC interacts with different factors in practice. During the process, the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT) will be used to recall the memory of the friendship development process. The estimated time of completing the survey and interview will be about 45 to 60 minutes. _____

The potential risks of the research

The study involves no potential risk to research participants. Your participation in the project is voluntary. You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

The dissemination of results

This study will provide valuable data for the field of Mainland-HK friendship development. The result of this study may be disseminated through graduation thesis, journal article, or academic conference.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Mr LEUNG, Yick Wah at telephone number 2948-7448 or their supervisor Dr YU, Baohua at telephone number 2948-7282.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Mr. LEUNG, Yick Wah
Principal Investigator

有關資料

從陌生人到朋友：如何建立中港學生的跨文化友誼

誠邀閣下參加喻寶華博士負責監督,梁亦華先生負責執行的研究計劃。他們是香港教育大學英語教育學系的教員及學生。

研究計劃簡介

A) 研究計劃目的

本研究計劃旨在了解中港友誼如何發展起來，包括友誼形成時學生所遇到的困難、不同友誼階段的影響因素、以及網上與現實溝通在中港友誼發展的角色。為此，本研究邀請擁有深入中港友誼的內地及香港學生接受訪談。為確保受訪者有更多中港友誼經驗以作分享，以及減少涉及情緒的偏見，本研究的受訪者須符合四個條件，包括(i)就讀於全日制本科課程；(ii)於香港生活超過 12 個月或以上；(iii) 中港友誼處於「熟人」階段或以上；及(iv)其中港友誼不涉及戀愛關係。

B) 研究方法

本研究將透過電郵向二年級或以上的本科或研究課程學生發出邀請電郵，並根據各自評的友誼階段，隨機邀請 12 至 24 人進行訪談，其中內地與香港學生比例為 1:1。

研究過程中，首先參與者會先填寫一份問卷，其中包括基本聯絡資料、中港友誼的溝通狀況自評、以及根據自身經驗列舉相關影響因素和困難。完成問卷後，參與者將接受半結構性訪談，內容包括受訪者建立中港友誼的困難、不同因素在各友誼階段所發揮的影響、以及網上和現實溝通在友誼發展的角色。研究者將使用回顧性訪談技巧(Retrospective Interview Technique, RIT)，以協助受訪者回顧友誼形成與發展的回憶。填寫問卷及訪談時間約為 45 至 60 分鐘。

本研究將為每位成功完成問卷與訪談的參與者提供 50 元超市禮券，以示感謝。除此以外，本研究並不為參與者提供個人利益。

C) 潛在風險

研究過程不會為參與者帶來任何風險或不適。

閣下的參與純屬自願性質。閣下享有充分的權利在任何時候決定退出這項研究,更不會因此引致任何不良後果。凡有關閣下的資料將會保密,一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。

D) 研究結果發佈

本研究所搜集數據將為中港友誼發展的課題提供寶貴的資料,並可能作撰寫畢業論文、發表期刊或參與學術會議之用。

如閣下想獲得更多有關這項研究的資料,請與梁亦華先生聯絡,電話 2948-7448或聯絡他的導師喻寶華博士,電話 2948-7282。

如閣下對這項研究的操守有任何意見,可隨時與香港教育大學人類實驗對象操守委員會聯絡(電郵:hrec@eduhk.hk; 地址:香港教育大學研究與發展事務處)。

謝謝閣下有興趣參與這項研究。

梁亦華先生
首席研究員

9.2 Invitation Email (Template)

Subject:

Invitation to participate the study: “From strangers to friends: How intercultural friendships develop between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students”

Dear fellow students,

As Aristotle said, "Without friends, no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods". Making friends is a precious experience, and always brings us impressive memory for our whole life, especially for the intercultural friendship. However, it is also full of challenges. Why someone could develop intercultural friendship successfully, but not others?"

To better understand the intercultural friendship between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students, you are cordially invited to join this study, which share your precious experience of intercultural friendship. Your contribution will be useful to help upcoming students to overcome different challenges when developing friendship and integrate into the local community successfully.

This study is conducted by the EdD student (EdUHK), Mr. Frankie Leung (supervised by Dr. Lucy Yu (ELE), which is a part of the doctoral thesis. The estimated time for completing the survey is about 20 to 25 minutes. If you (i) consider that their intercultural friendship is more than “acquaintance” status (Not romantic relationship; and (ii) arrive in Hong Kong less than 6 months before the programme started (mainland student only). Please kindly share your precious experience via the following link:

Local student: <https://anonmachg2.eduhk.hk/machform/view.php?id=29641867>

Mainland students:

<https://anonmachg2.eduhk.hk/machform/view.php?id=29642095>

Please note that your anonymity and confidentiality are assured. Completion of the survey should take about 20 to 25 minutes. The data supplied by you will be protected under the "Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance". After completing the survey, you will be automatically entered into a lucky draw for winning a ParknShop coupon worth HK\$30. The survey will end on 31 January 2019, and the lucky draw will be held afterwards and the winners will be notified in March 2019.

If you have any questions regarding the survey, please feel free to contact me, Mr Frankie Leung, at yickwah@eduhk.hk (2948-7448)

Thanks again, and look forwards to have your precious sharing.

Best regards,

Frankie

EdD student, ELE

The Education University of Hong Kong

9.3 Questionnaire Survey (Online)

A. 背景資料 Demographic and background survey

個人資料 Personal Information

電郵 Email : _____

年齡 Age : _____

性別 Gender : _____

出生地 (城市 / 國家) _____

Place of residence (Home Town / Country) : _____ / _____

母語 Mother Tongue : _____

課程 Programme : _____

主修科目 Majoring subject : _____

在港就學時間 Length of study in Hong Kong : _____ Years _____ Months

閣下完成學位後，會否計劃留在香港工作或升學?

After graduate, do you plan to stay in Hong Kong for employment or further study?

☐ 會，計劃留在香港工作 Yes, I plan to stay in Hong Kong for employment.

☐ 會，計劃留在香港升學 Yes, I plan to stay in Hong Kong for further study.

☐ 不會 No.

☐ 未決定 Not decide yet.

B. 語文水平與溝通意願 Language Proficiency & Willingness to communicate

B1. Scale of second-language Proficiency (Adopted from Yu & Downing, 2012)

請根據您目前的粵、普、英的語文水平，圈出適當的數字：

Please select your level of proficiency with the Cantonese, Putonghua and English by circling the corresponding number

		完全不懂 No proficiency	差 Poor	一般 Average	好 Good	優秀 Excellent
Cantonese 粵語	Reading 讀 (繁體字)	1	2	3	4	5
	Writing 寫 (繁體字)	1	2	3	4	5
	Listening 聽	1	2	3	4	5
	Speaking 說	1	2	3	4	5
Putonghua 普通話	Reading 讀 (簡體字)	1	2	3	4	5
	Writing 寫 (簡體字)	1	2	3	4	5
	Listening 聽	1	2	3	4	5
	Speaking 說	1	2	3	4	5
English 英語	Reading 讀	1	2	3	4	5
	Writing 寫	1	2	3	4	5
	Listening 聽	1	2	3	4	5
	Speaking 說	1	2	3	4	5

B2. Willingness to communicate outside the classroom (Revised version)

(Adopted from MacIntyre et al., 2001)

請根據您的狀況，選出最能您的跨文化溝通習慣的選項：

Please select the most appropriate item which can best describe your current intercultural communication situation:

Task	L2 as Putonghua 普通話作為第二語言				
	Almost Never 幾乎從不				Almost Always 幾乎經常
跟隨簡體中文指示，完成任務 Listen to instructions in Simplified Chinese and complete a task	1	2	3	4	5
按簡體中文食譜焗製蛋糕 Bake a cake if instructions were only in Simplified Chinese.	1	2	3	4	5
用普通話進行遊戲(如大富翁) Play a game in Putonghua, for example Monopoly.	1	2	3	4	5
試想像您對一項任務要求不清晰，您有多大程度希望得到普通話指引？ Imagine that you are confused about a task you must complete. How willing are you to ask for instructions or clarification in Putonghua?	1	2	3	4	5
在課後與教師以普通話討論課業 Speak Putonghua to your teacher or professor after class about an assignment.	1	2	3	4	5
以簡體中文填寫申請表 Fill out an application form in Simplified Chinese.	1	2	3	4	5
候車時與普通話朋友聊天 Talk to an Putonghua-speaking friend while waiting in line.	1	2	3	4	5
接受普通話使用者的指示 Take directions from an Putonghua speaker.	1	2	3	4	5
在最近一次假期中與朋友以普通話聊天 Speak in Putonghua in a group about a recent vacation that you took.	1	2	3	4	5
以普通話描述您最喜歡的一套遊戲 Describe the rules of your favourite game in Putonghua.	1	2	3	4	5
試想像陌生人進入您所在的房間，並與您交談，您會多大程度上以普通話回應？ Imagine that a stranger enters the room that you are in. How willing would you be to have a conversation in Putonghua if he talked to you first?	1	2	3	4	5
嘗試了解普通話電影 Try to understand a Putonghua movie.	1	2	3	4	5

[內地學生版本 / Mainland student's version]

B2. Willingness to communicate outside the classroom (Revised version)

(Adopted from MacIntyre et al., 2001)

請根據您的狀況，選出最能您的跨文化溝通習慣的選項：

Please select the most appropriate item which can best describe your current intercultural communication situation:

Task	L2 as Cantonese 粵語作為第二語言				
	Almost Never 几乎从不				Almost Always 几乎经常
跟随繁体中文指示，完成任务 Listen to instructions in Traditional Chinese and complete a task	1	2	3	4	5
按繁体中文食谱焗制蛋糕 Bake a cake if instructions were only in Traditional Chinese.	1	2	3	4	5
用粤语进行游戏(如大富翁) Play a game in Cantonese, for example Monopoly.	1	2	3	4	5
试想像您不清晰一项任务的要求，您有多大程度希望得到粤语指引？ Imagine that you are confused about a task you must complete. How willing are you to ask for instructions or clarification in Cantonese?	1	2	3	4	5
在课后与教师以粤语讨论课业 Speak Cantonese to your teacher or professor after class about an assignment.	1	2	3	4	5
以繁体中文填写申请表 Fill out an application form in Traditional Chinese.	1	2	3	4	5
候车时与粤语朋友聊天 Talk to an Cantonese-speaking friend while waiting in line.	1	2	3	4	5
接受粤语使用者的指示 Take directions from an Cantonese speaker.	1	2	3	4	5
在最近一次假期中与朋友以粤语聊天 Speak in Cantonese in a group about a recent vacation that you took.	1	2	3	4	5
以粤语描述您最喜欢的一套游戏 Describe the rules of your favourite game in Cantonese.	1	2	3	4	5
试想像陌生人进入您所在的房间，并与您交谈，您会多大程度上以粤语回应？ Imagine that a stranger enters the room that you are in. How willing would you be to have a conversation in Cantonese if he talked to you first?	1	2	3	4	5
尝试了解粤语电影 Try to understand a Cantonese movie.	1	2	3	4	5

C. 自我陳述問卷 Self-report survey

C1. Description of different friendship stages

(Adopted from Knapp, Vangelisti & Caughlin, 2014, p.46)

請回想您最好的一段跨文化友誼的狀況，在最能代表您目前跨文化友誼關係的欄目內加上「✓」：

Please recall the memory of your best Intercultural friendship, and put a “✓” in the statement which can best describe your current intercultural friendship status:

對目前友誼的描述	
Description of your current intercultural friendship	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>相處時，我感到猶豫和緊張。我會嘗試表現自己最理想、討人歡喜、能被理解和被社會接受的一面。我們會仔細觀察對方以減少不確定性，並希望了解對方的個性、心情、興趣和對我們的觀感。話題一般包含背景資料(如(名字、就讀學科、家鄉等)、天氣、環境、娛樂旅行等表面或輕鬆的話題。</p> <p>I feel hesitant and nervous when meeting each other, and we try to display ourselves as a person who is pleasant, likable, understanding and socially adept. We are carefully observing the other to reduce any uncertainty - hoping to gain clarification of mood, interest, orientation toward us, and aspects of the other's public personality.</p> <p>Most conversation is about general information exchange (e.g. name, hometown or majoring subject) and superficial topics, such as weather, environment or relaxing things (like entertainment or travelling).</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>相處時，我會對對方感到好奇，也會努力尋找共同話題，如家庭狀況、共同愛好和興趣、或共同經驗，以整合話題。</p> <p>I feel uncertain, but curious about each other, and try to search commonalities, and primarily interested in searching for an integrating topic (e.g. family, hobbies, common interest) or past experience.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>相處時，我感到溫暖和親密感。我們自我訊息披露量會增加，並會分享一些會曝露自行弱點的事，包括過去隱藏的秘密、恐懼、挫折、失敗、個人缺點、偏見、個人道德價值等。</p> <p>I feel warm and close when meeting each other. The amount of self-disclosure increases, and may involve some previously withheld secrets, fears, frustrations, failures, imperfections, prejudices or individual moral value, which may make ourselves vulnerable.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>我感到我們就像融為一體，我們的態度、意見、興趣和品味能讓我們與其他朋友區分出來。一些共同習慣、身份和隱語，也讓我們友誼顯得獨一無二。我們的話題涉及敏感題目，如政治立場或對共同經常的反思，也涉及最深入的自我披露，如秘密、性、未來計劃等。</p> <p>I feel like one person when meeting him/her. Our attitudes, opinions, interests and tastes could clearly distinguish us from others. Some shared routines, identity and jargon are developed that make us unique. Our conversation involves some sensitive issues, such as the political propensity personal reflection about common experience. My deepest self-disclosure may also be involved, such as secrets, sex, and discussion of future plan.</p>

C2. The status of your current intercultural friendship

請根據您目前的跨文化友誼狀況，回答下列問題：

Please answer the questions according to your current intercultural friendship:

2-1. 您目前有多少位香港朋友(於香港出生及長大)? (如您是香港學生，請跳過本題)
How many Hong Kong friends (who were born and raised in Hong Kong) do you have currently?

2-2. 您目前有多少位內地朋友(於內地出生及長大)? (如您是內地學生，請跳過本題)
How many Mainland friends (who were born and raised in Mainland) do you have currently?
(Skip this if you are Mainland student)

2-3. 請在下表中選出最能代表您對現在跨文化友誼看法的數字

On the scale below, please select the number which represents your feeling about the statement about your current intercultural friendship status:

	十分不同意 Strongly Disagree	不同意 Disagree	一般 Neutral	同意 Agree	十分同意 Strongly Agree
總體而言，我滿意目前中港友誼的數目 In general, I am satisfied with the <u>number</u> of my Mainland-HK friendship.	1	2	3	4	5
總體而言，我滿意目前中港友誼的質量 In general, I am satisfied with the <u>quality</u> of my Mainland-HK friendship.	1	2	3	4	5

C3. Usage of online social network in intercultural communication

請根據您目前跨文化友誼的溝通模式，回答下列問題：

Please answer the questions according to your communication mode of Intercultural friendship:

3-1 您每天會花多少時間，跟內地朋友作網上溝通？(如不適用，請填上 N.A)

How many hours will you spend on online communication with Hong Kong / non-local friends on an average day? (Please write N.A. if not applicable)

3-2 你會用哪種「文字訊息平台」作跨文化友誼的網上溝通？(如不適用，請填上 N.A)

What type of text-messaging platform will you use to communicate with local friends in your intercultural friendship? (Please write N.A. if not applicable)

3-3 你會用哪些「社交網絡平台」作跨文化友誼的網上溝通？(如不適用，請填上 N.A)

What type of social-networking site will you use in your intercultural friendship? (Please write N.A. if not applicable)

C4. Self-reported factors of intercultural friendship formation and development

(Adopted from Chen, 2016)

請回想您與最好的跨文化朋友的相處經歷，回答下列問題：

Please recall the memory with your best Mainland / HK friend, and answer the following question:

4-1. 請根據您的「跨文化友誼建立」經驗，列舉其中的主要困難：

Please suggest the main challenges that you had experienced in the formation of your Intercultural friendship:

4-2. 請根據您的「跨文化友誼發展」經驗，列舉其中的主要影響因素：

Please suggest the factors that had contributed to your Intercultural friendship according to your experience:

9.4 Interview Protocol

(Adopted and revised from Chen, 2016, Huang, 2008; and Sias et al, 2008)

A. 建立跨文化友誼的困難 Perceived challenges of the intercultural friendship formation

試回顧您跟其中一位最深厚友誼的跨文化朋友的友誼發展經歷，再回答以下問題：

Please recall your memory with the best intercultural friend and answer the following questions:

A1. 您是何時，透過甚麼方式結識他/她？

When and how do you meet him / her?

A2. 對您而言，有甚麼原因鼓勵您建立跨文化友誼？---

What motivates you to build up Intercultural friendship?---

A3. 依您所見，有甚麼原因鼓勵對方建立跨文化友誼？

In your view, what motivates him / her to build up Intercultural friendship?

A4. 從認識至今，您跟對方的友誼，有否存在甚麼困難？您如何應對它們？

Since you have meet each other, what challenges have you met so far? How do you respond to them?

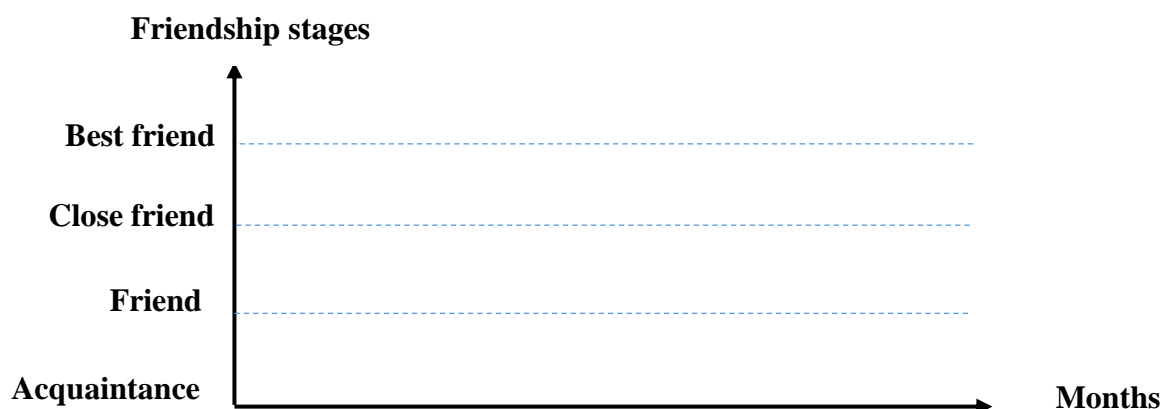
A5. 您認為學校(官方或非官方活動)在發展跨文化友誼方面有何幫助？您覺得有效嗎？為甚麼？

Did your university offer any help in developing your intercultural friendship? Are they effective, and why?

B. 不同友誼階段的影響因素 Influential factors at different friendship stages

請參考完成下面跨文化友誼的發展圖表，再回答問題。

Please complete the following graph according your experience, and answer the questions.



B1. 您如何定義何謂「朋友」？這定義在跨文化友誼中，有否不同？

How do you define “friend”? Could this definition apply to your intercultural friendship?

B2. 回顧您們的跨文化友誼，有甚麼事件或片段，標誌著您們各個友誼階段的改變？

In your intercultural friendship, what event or issues have marked the change of different friendship stages?

B3. 參考您在「問卷部份」提出的友誼影響因素，您認為它們如何在各個階段發揮作用((i) 熟人至朋友階段; (ii) 朋友至密友階段; (iii) 密友至摯友階段)？為甚麼？(如需要，出示「提示頁」)

Taking reference of your answer at phase two, how do they exert influence at different friendship stages (i) Acquaintance to friend; Friend to close friend; (iii) close friend to best friend)? Why? (Showing probe upon request)

B4. 你希望未來進一步跟對方發展更深入的友誼嗎？哪些因素能幫助(或限制)您們的友誼發展？

In the future, would you like to further deepen your intercultural friendship? What factors would contribute (or inhibit) your friendship development?

C. 溝通意願、溝通與跨文化友誼發展 Communication and intercultural friendship

C1. 在您的跨文化友誼中，有哪次聊天經驗最令你印象深刻？它如何促進或影響您們的友誼發展？

Could you recall any impressive conversation during your Intercultural friendship? And how does it promote or influence your friendship development?

C2. 在跨文化溝通時，您跟對方會談及甚麼話題？或避免甚麼話題？為甚麼？

During communication with Intercultural friends, what conversation topic will you usually prefer or avoid? Why?

C3. 您通常選用甚麼語言跟對方溝通？為甚麼？

What will you usually use for intercultural communication? And why? (i) Feeling of being outperformed? (ii) Worried about being laughed; (iii) worried about L2 was not good as your friend - low language proficiency?)

C4. 回顧最初，有甚麼因素能鼓勵您主動跟香港人溝通？這如何促進您目前的友誼？

Recalling the memory, what are factors that encourage your communication with Hong Kong people? And how does it facilitate your current friendship with local students? _____

C5. 對您而言，您認為網上社交網絡會否促進，或抑制跨文化溝通？為甚麼？_____

Do you think online social network could facilitate, or inhibit your intercultural communication with intercultural friends? Why?

D. 總結 Summarizing question

D1. 如有新入學的學生希望結交跨文化朋友，徵求您的意見。您會提出甚麼建議？

If a new student asked you to provide some suggestion for making intercultural friends, what will you suggest?

9.5 提示表 Probe Sheet

Probe sheet: Influential factors of intercultural friendship

(Adopted and revised from Chen, 2016)

The influential factors of intercultural friendship may include, but not limited to the following:

Category	Factor
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using common social apps, like Blog (e.g. Weibo), instant-messaging platform (e.g. WeChat or WhatsApp), Photo-sharing platform (e.g. Twitter or Instagram)• Watch and appreciate similar TV programme
Working attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Similar working Style
Interests and hobbies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Similar interests, hobbies and common activities
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spending time together• Engaging in school activities• Being each other's' company
Assimilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assimilating to each other's social circle• Make oneself assimilate into others' social circle
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being familiar with different accent• Understanding slang and jargons or other's' dialects• Avoid speaking Fukien during communication
Political issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show respect, tolerate and avoid making judgment to others• Openness about political issues or incompatible concepts• Explaining political or current events to each other
Personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matching personality or ethics
Values and belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Similar views on values• Views on finance and spending money• Search for the same views on values
Emotional connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mutual liking• Remember the moments that affect each other

Curiosity about culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity about other's culture • Share different customs and culture
Respect and tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding prejudice or judgement • Tolerance and open-minded • Respect different recognition and ask for reasons behind • More patience and mutual understanding
Shared experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having the same extracurricular activities • Similar living or study experience

提示表：跨文化友誼的影響因素

(Adopted and revised from Chen, 2016)

影響跨文化友誼的因素可能包括，但不限於以下各項：

項目	因素
社交媒體	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 使用博客（如微博），即時通訊平台（如微信或 WhatsApp），照片分享平台（如 Twitter 或 Instagram）等常用社交應用程式 • 觀看和欣賞相似的電視節目
工作態度	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 相似的工作風格
興趣與愛好	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 相似的興趣愛好和共同的活動
時間	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 花時間在一起 • 參與學校活動 • 參與彼此的社交圈子
同化	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 同化對方的社交圈 • 讓自己融入對方的社交圈子
語言	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 熟悉不同的口音 • 理解對方語言中的俚語 • 避免在溝通過程中講自身語言
政治議題	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 尊重，容忍，避免對他人作出判斷 • 對於不相容的政治議題或觀念持開放態度 • 解釋彼此的政治或時事的觀點
個性	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 相配合的個性或道德觀
價值觀與信念	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 相似的價值觀 • 相似的理財觀
情感聯繫	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 相互喜歡 • 記著互相影響的時刻
對文化的好奇心	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 對其他文化的好奇心 • 分享不同的習俗和文化
尊重與寬容	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 避免偏見或判斷 • 寬容和開放 • 尊重不同的理解，並尋求背後的原因
共同經驗	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 參與相同的課外活動 • 相似的生活或學習經歷

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