Insights Into Greeting Cards to Enhance the Business Communication and Relation Between Finnish and Chinese Companies

International Business Communication

Master's thesis

Xiaolai You

2013

Department of Communication
Aalto University
School of Business

AALTO UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS   ABSTRACT
Master's Thesis in International Business Communication   24 May 2013
Xiaolai You

Insights into greeting cards to enhance the business communication and relation between Finnish and Chinese companies

Objective of the study
The objective of the study is to identify the role that the greeting cards play in the business contexts between Finnish and Chinese companies, to figure out whether sending greeting cards has positive impacts on business relations, and to clarify that people's preference on a certain image and color is due to cultural factors or business background. The aim of the study is to help the international companies realize the importance of holiday greetings and keep longer relationships with clients and business partners.

Methodology and the theoretical framework
The study takes qualitative research approach. The method is semi-structured interview with eight marketing experts from international companies that have both offices in Finland and China. The data come from both pilot interviews and theme interviews. The theoretical framework is based on the previous studies of cultural differences of Finland and China, color perceptions of the two nations, and the image selection within the business contexts. Culture, color and image are the three linked elements in the research, which serves as a basis of the research questions.

Findings and conclusions
Cultural factors are affecting the selection of greeting cards, and sending greeting cards has positive impacts on business communication and relations. Customer relations can be the by-products of the holiday greetings. Finns tend to choose cold colors as the background color like blue, while Chinese prefer the warm colors such as red and orange. The blue color for Finns is to show formality and trustworthiness, and the red for Chinese is to show happiness and friendliness. Finnish businessmen expect the greeting card with less color types simple image design. Chinese businessmen appreciate the conciseness of the image, and hope to see the Christmas elements on the card if it is for the Christmas purpose, such as Santa Claus, Christmas tree, gifts, etc.

Key words: greeting card, color, color perception, image, business communication, business relation, intercultural business communication, Finnish-Chinese company, Finnish culture, Chinese culture, Christmas card

阿尔托大学经济学院 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**摘要**
国际商务交流专业硕士论文 　　　　　　　　　　**2013 年 5 月 24 日**
尤笑来

洞悉节日贺卡加强中芬公司间的商务交流和商务关系

研究目标
本论文的研究目标是确认节日贺卡在中芬公司商务领域中的作用，认识互赠节日贺卡是否对商务关系有正面的影响，同时澄清对特定图像和颜色的偏好是由于文化因素还是商业背景因素。研究目的是帮助国际公司认清节日问候的重要性，以及和客户与工作伙伴保持更长久的合作关系。

研究方法和理论框架
本论文采用定性分析的研究方法，采用半结构式访谈的形式与八位市场专家进行访谈，他们都任职于国际大公司，在芬兰与中国都有业务往来。数据来源是初级访谈和主题访谈。理论框架基于之前的文献综述，有中芬文化差异、两国间的色彩认知、商务领域内的图像选择。文化、色彩和图像是本研究中的三大关联元素，同时也为论文的问题研究作基础。

研究发现和结论
文化因素对贺卡的选择产生影响，互赠贺卡对商务交流和商务关系有着正面的影响。客户关系可以是节日问候的副产物。芬兰人倾向于选择冷色调的背景颜色，比如蓝色，而中国人更喜好暖色调，比如红色和橘黄色。蓝色对于芬兰人来说象征着正统、诚信，红色对于中国人来说意味着欢乐、友好。芬兰商务人士期望贺卡颜色单调、图案简单，中国商务人士注重图像简洁，如果是圣诞贺卡的话，希望能见到圣诞元素，比如圣诞老人、圣诞树、礼物等等。

关键词：贺卡、颜色、色彩认知、图像、商务交流、商务关系、跨文化商务交流、中芬公司、芬兰文化、中国文化、圣诞贺卡

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

1. INTRODUCTION

With globalization, China has been playing an increasingly important role in both consumer and business-to-business contexts. Today's China is a highly westernized market with omnipresence of Western elements like food, dressing, celebration of typical Western holidays, etc. To some extent, Chinese children anticipate Christmas Day more than the traditional Chinese New Year. It is reported by CNTV news (2011, accessed on 24.9.2012) that retail stores and catering businesses often witness their soar during Chinese Spring Festival, namely Chinese New Year.

Recently, our pace of life is so fast that we do not even have time to say "hello" to each other. Working and studying are filling most of our lives now. People usually find it difficult to keep a good friendship with friends because of distance and time. People do not contact each other very often even if the information and technology are so developed now. Time and distance really hurt the relationships no matter how intimate you are. Gradually, a new topic about how to keep a certain relation arises. Cheal (1986) mentions that holidays like Christmas and New Year are good opportunities to renew relationships. Greeting cards can keep not only personal relationships with friends, but also business relationships. This is what the author's motivation lies in. The aim is to find out how holiday greetings maintain and recover relationships in business contexts.

1.1 Research objective and questions

Today, we live in a cultural world with symbols and signs (Goldman and Papson, 2004). During holidays, a large number of greeting cards containing certain symbols and signs are sent to one another. Of the total greeting cards sales, 45% are seasonal. And of that 60% are Christmas cards (Tutunjian, 2002, p. 41). According to Nan Tong Net (2012, accessed on 24.9.2012), in China, greeting cards for Chinese Spring Festival account for around 85% of

the total card sales annually, so greeting cards are very popular during holidays. China is a high-context nation in which connection (guanxi) plays an important role in business as well as everyday life. Sending greeting cards is an effective way to maintain such connections. Those 85% of the greeting cards sold during Spring Festival period are mostly used for business purpose.

Finland is a very important trade partner to China. It was estimated (2011) that the Finnish-Chinese trade volume reached 9.53 billion US dollars in 2010, increased by 22.2% (Finland-China Trade Abstract 2011, accessed on 24.9.2012). The huge demand for Nokia phones in the Chinese market drives an even closer relation between these two countries. It is a very critical age to keep such good business relations now.

There is abundant research on the greeting cards in personal life (Dindia, Timmerman, Langan, Sahlstein and Quandt 2004; Cacippo & Andersen 1981; Souvenirs, Gifts, & Novelties 2007, etc.). However, little research addresses the greeting cards' impact on business communication and relations. Additionally, gift selection and gift sending during holidays are more common than greeting cards. Hullut Päivät promotion in Stockmann always has more gifts than cards, so why people tend to exchange gifts more often than cards is not at all surprising. There exist a deep gap in the research of greeting card-related areas in business. Many aspects of gift sending like Christmas gift search behaviors, gift selection for social roles, gift receipt of interpersonal relationships, etc. have all been extensively researched, but when it comes to the greeting cards' impacts during holidays in the business contexts, a few studies are available.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to find out how to utilize the greeting cards to enhance the business communication and relations between Finland and China. The research is done by analyzing the impact of greeting cards on business.

Thus, the main question to be addressed is

What is the role of greeting cards in business communication and relations between Finnish and Chinese companies?

In order to concentrate on the specific field of the study, another three sub-questions have been created:

1. Are cultural factors affecting the selection of greeting cards?

2. What is the preferred color of greeting cards in business contexts?

3. What is the preferred image of greeting cards in business contexts?

To begin with, we should clarify the difference between greeting card and business card because readers are very likely to mix these two concepts up. Cambridge Dictionary defines greeting card as

> "A piece of thick paper folded in half with a picture on the outside and a message inside, which you write in and send or give to someone, for example at Christmas or on their birthday".

That is to say, a greeting card is "a decorative card sent to convey good wishes" by the definition of Oxford Dictionary. However, a business card means "a small card printed with one's name, occupation, business address, etc." in Oxford Dictionary. This thesis discusses about the impact of greeting cards rather than the role that business cards play.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This paper is organized into six chapters. The first chapter has introduced the background information, the research objective and the research questions of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the previous literature in cultural difference between Finland and China as well as their communication styles respectively, the value of greeting cards in business and relation, and the analysis of colors and images on the greeting cards. It also provides the color perception of Finns and Chinese.

Chapter 3 demonstrates the selected research methods and the data of the present study.

Chapter 4 gets the main findings derived from the interviews. The objective of the section is to find out the role that greeting cards play in business communication and relation between Finnish and Chinese companies. Cultural impacts on the selection of the image and the color can also help answer the objective.

Chapter 5 discusses the main findings of the research, and their links to the Literature Review.

Chapter 6 concludes the study and practical implications, and also states the limitations and suggestions for the future studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews previous literature and studies in the aspect of greeting cards' impact on business communication as well as the cultural differences between Finland and China. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview on this topic of sending greeting cards during holidays as well as its impact on business communication.

The literature review is divided into four sections. First, the influence of culture on business communication is addressed from the point of view of intercultural communication between Finland and China. Some sub-titles concern the cultural values and communication styles of both countries. Second, the value of sending greeting cards is discussed in general as a tool for maintaining business relations. Third, color-related difference in Finnish and Chinese culture is presented, which has a deep influence on image and card selection. The fourth section is concluded with a presentation of the theoretical framework based on the reviewed literature.

2.1 Culture factors hinder communication

On the surface, it seems that sending greeting cards does not have anything to do with cultural differences, but why people choose a certain type of card does. Hofsted G. (1991, preface) writes in his book Cultures and Organizations that "cultural difference concerns everyone who meets people from outside his or her own narrow circle, and in the modern world that is virtually everybody".

In Chaney and Martin's (2007) book of Intercultural Business Communication, they claim already that communication and culture are not separable, and always bound together. The official definition of communication in the Webster's Dictionary (2001, p.134) is "the act of transmitting idea through writing or speech; the means to transmit messages between places or persons." Thus, the message we send and receive is the result of communication.

Hackman and Johnson (1991) define the communication as the transfer of symbols that contain meaning within individuals, so the communication like transmitting symbols is an interactive way with audiences and listeners by using verbal and non-verbal languages (Hackman and Johnson 1991 in Jorfi 2012, p. 5). Asimov (1987) mentioned that communication has played a vitally important role in the evolution into such a civilized and prosperous society. Communication is good help to develop culture (Asimov 1987 in Jorfi 2012, p. 5). Luftman (2004) argued that it is very necessary to sustain a culture in order to support effective communication in an organization (Luftman 2004 in Jorfi 2012, p. 7-8). Some scholars like Chaney and Martin (2007) pointed out the close relationship of culture and communication, quoted as follows: "When cultures interact, adaptation must take place for the cultures to communicate effectively. With intercultural business communication, being aware of each culture's symbols, how they are the same, and how they are different is important." (Chaney and Martin, 2007, p.5)

Culture is like an iceberg with half below the sea and half above. The manifest culture is quite apparent, but the basic assumption of the iceberg under the sea is invisible. However, understanding a culture's basic assumption is highly important both for personal contact and business communication. A large number of researchers and scholars have already developed outstanding frameworks for the cultural studies.

Importantly, when concerning the influence of culture on business communication, we all reach the agreement that culture and communication is inseparable and interconnected. Therefore, in order to understand how Finnish and Chinese businessmen decide on the greeting card selection, it is also very important to understand the cultural differences that influence the communication and the way to implement the Finnish-Chinese intercultural communication. The first sub-research question can be seen as a question addressing this topic: "Are cultural factors affecting the selection of greeting cards?"

2.1.1 The influence of culture on business communication

In order to answer the first sub-question: "Are cultural factors affecting the selection of greeting cards?", it is highly necessary to know the key aspects of the culture, at least the more the better. In fact, the biggest task in this section is to explain the close connection between culture and communication, which works as a foundation for the upcoming section: intercultural business communication between Finland and China.

This section is elaborated by Hall's (1990) theory and Hofstede's (2001) classic study, where Hall's theory focuses on cultural factors and Hosfstede's study on four dimensions of cultural values.

❖ **Hall's cultural factors**

Hall (1990) introduces the concepts of context, space, time and information flow across different cultures. This thesis emphasizes the first three dimensions and provides more details in the following texts.

A lot of his theories are still widely used and quoted today, such as high-context and low-context cultures, and polychronic and monochronic cultures. Here, the concept of context can be regarded as the amount of information needed explicitly to conduct smooth and successful communication. In this sense, people from low-context cultures like Americans and Europeans (exceptional cases exist like Spain, France, Italy, etc.) tend to express more explicitly than those from high-context cultures like Asians. Sometimes a Japanese or a Chinese relying "yes" merely means he is listening rather than he agrees, which might be very confusing to a person who does not understand the unwritten rules of this culture. Sanderson (2008) in his book mentions "Chinese people frequently use the word 'yes' simply to mean 'I hear you' or 'I know what you are saying', to give a harmonious air to a dialogue. Never assume that 'yes' means 'I agree', or 'let's do it'. (Sanderson, 2008, p. 30)"

Similarly, Finns usually use more explicitly stated information when communicating with each other, while Chinese use more implicitly stated information. The following table is abstracted from an international company, Jeitosa Group's official website (http://www.jeitosa.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/GDA-Global-Diversity-Awareness-Datasheet-v012012.pdf access on 24.9.2012). Table 1 shows the comparison between the low-context countries and the high-context countries from the dimension of business outlook, work ethic, work style, employee desires, relationships, decision process, communication, planning horizons, sense of time, view of change, knowledge and learning.

Table 1. Case example of the comparison between low-context and high-context countries

	Low-Context	High-Context
Example Countries	US, UK, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Norway	Japan, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, Italy, Spain
Business Outlook	Competitive	Cooperative
Work Ethic	Task-oriented	Relationship-oriented
Work Style	Individualistic	Team-oriented
Employee Desires	Individual achievement	Team achievement
Relationships	Many, looser, short-term	Fewer, tighter, long-term
Decision Process	Logical, linear, rule-oriented	Intuitive, relational
Communication	Verbal over Non-verbal	Non-verbal over Verbal
Planning Horizons	More explicit, written, formal	More implicit, oral, informal
Sense of Time	Present/Future-oriented	Deep respect for the past
View of Change	Change over tradition	Tradition over change
Knowledge	Explicit, conscious	Implicit, not fully conscious
Learning	Knowledge is transferable (above the waterline)	Knowledge is situational (below the waterline)

Case countries include China and Japan from Asia, Norway and UK from Europe, and US and Canada from Northern America, etc.

Furthermore, when it comes to space-related things, Hall (1990, p. 149) calls this study "theory of proxemics", suggesting that people will try to keep different degrees of personal distance depending on the cultural background and relationship with each other. According to Hall, for instance, Japanese people usually need less space when talking with each other, so they would stand closer to an American, which probably makes him uncomfortable or even feel offensive. Culture in space aspect can also result in other differences. Cars of American brands are larger and more spacious than those of Japanese brands because streets in Japan are usually very narrow. Larger-sized cars can possibly make the streets even more crowded.

In addition, Hall's (1990, p. 173) another commonly used concept is time which has a great influence on intercultural studies. He divides the societies into two types – monochronic and polychronic. Monochronic cultures like to do one thing at a time. They have a certain timeline to do everything one by one. They value continuity and hate interruptions. Polychronic cultures like to do multiple things at the same time.

Based on Hall's theory on monochronic and polychronic culture, Chaney and Martin's (2007) short summary is even more understandable and succinct as follows:

<u>Monochronic People</u>

- Do one thing at a time
- Concentrate on the task
- Take time commitments seriously and value promptness
- Are committed to the task
- Show respect for private property; rarely borrow or lend
- Are accustomed to short-term relationships

Polychronic People

- Do many things at once
- Are highly distractible and subject to interruptions
- Consider time commitments more casually; promptness based on the relationship
- Are committed to people
- Borrow and lend things often
- Tend to build lifetime relationships

(Chaney and Martin, 2007, p. 117)

Finally, Hall (1990) also studies the information flow. This concept is measured by the time period that a message probably takes from one part of an organization to another as well as by the desired reaction. However, this thesis does not elaborate this dimension any more.

❖ **Hofstede's dimensions of cultural values**

Geert Hofstede's (2001) classic study of dimensions of cultural values provides measurable concepts to compare cultural differences. This Dutch social psychologist believes that "people carry 'mental programs' that are developed in the family in early childhood and reinforced in schools and organizations, and that these mental programs contain a component of national culture. They are most clearly expressed in the different values that predominate among people from different countries" (2001, p. XIX). He carried out his research with 116,000 employees from IBM in 72 countries. Hofstede identifies four dimensions of values among cultures: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity.

Hofstede (1991) defines the dimension Individualism as follows: "individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family" (Hofstede 1991, p. 51). In

individualistic countries, an individual's rights and opinions rather than group's are highly valued. Countries like United Kingdom, Finland, etc. belong to individualistic ones. Collectivistic cultures value the overall group performances. China and Japan are typical collectivistic nations. Mexico is also a collectivistic country in Latin America. People there usually look after each other and make group decisions (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier 2002).

The dimension of Power Distance, according to Hofstede (1991), is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (p. 28). People treat more equally in small power distance countries than in large power distance ones. In Denmark, a small power distance country, employees are all involved in decision-making and often a disregard of hierarchical status. In a large power distance culture, the differences in rank are very clear, and the inequality of power and wealth within an organization and society is accepted as normal. In most large power distance countries, top management usually makes most decisions and the organizations have many hierarchical levels.

Uncertainty Avoidance indicates the extent of tolerance for uncertainty in the organization or society (Hofstede 1991, p. 111). In this sense, a strong uncertainty avoidance country has a low tolerance for uncertainty, so this country should have a more explicit and clear rules of behavior in order to decrease the amount of uncertainty. In these nations, people are required to obey the strict laws that would have severe penalties for offenders. A high sense of security prevails throughout these countries. Take Greece for example, a strong uncertainty avoidance country. Some high level managements are risk-averse. Consequently, managers and directors are very likely to work in the same company for a long time, even life-time long. By contrast, cultures in weak uncertainty avoidance countries are more flexible. People concern less about uncertainty, so they are more easygoing and less rule-oriented, and prone to take risk.

The final dimension of masculinity/femininity in Hofstede's (1991, p. 81) theory also tells the difference between cultures. A high masculinity index indicates the significant differences between men's and women's roles in the society. In a masculine society, the "tough" ideas are valued such as assertiveness, competition, and desire for wealth, etc. On the other hand, feminine cultures value the "tender" things such as personal relationships, quality of life, etc. The femininity traits also show the equal gender roles in the society.

2.1.2 Finnish-Chinese business culture comparison

In the previous section, a lot of cultural theories have been concretely stated, which is highly essential for understanding the following parts. At the beginning of this section, cultural comparison between Finland and China is presented by use of Hofstede dimension scores so that the general picture of these two countries is clearly shown. Table 2 below demonstrates the scores of the two countries.

Table 2. Cultural Dimension Scores of Finland and China
(adapted from Hofstede 2001, p. 500-502)

	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism/ Collectivism	Masculinity/ Femininity	Long-/Short-Term Orientation
Finland	33	59	63	26	41
China	80	30	20	66	118

From the index in Table 2, it is quite obvious that between Finland and China exists a huge difference in the aspects of culture. The potential meaning of each dimension has already elaborated in 2.1.1. The biggest difference lies in the long-/short- term orientation. Chinese tend to consider more and longer than Finns. Hence, a small implication can be seen: long-term relationship plays an extremely important role in business cooperation for Chinese businessmen.

Additionally, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) compare the cultural differences up to fifty countries, involving approximately 30000 managers worldwide in their book *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*, which is very relevant to the current study (See Table 3.).

Table 3. Finnish-Chinese cultural comparison (adapted from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997, p. 51, p. 57, p. 70, p. 88, p. 93, p. 144, p. 162, p. 169 & Penkova 2012, p. 42)

	Finland	China
Percentage of respondents opting for individual freedom	64%	41%
Percentage of respondents opting for individual responsibility	38%	37%
Feeling upset at work, respondents would not show emotions openly	41%	55%
Percentage of respondents who would not help the boss if he asks them to help him paint his house	89%	32%
Percentage of respondents who disagree that the company should provide housing	70%	18%
Percentage of respondents who believe what happens to them is their own doing	68%	39%
Percentage of respondents opting to be left alone to get the job done	85%	57%
Percentage of respondents opting for function rather than personality as a reason for organization	98%	85%

Table 3 is the summary of cultural comparison between Finland and China, adapted from this book. From Table 3, some apparent conclusions can be easily drawn. Firstly, Finns are much more individualistic than Chinese while Chinese rely more on the team work. That is why they feel what happens to them, whatever failure or success, is not necessarily their own doing. Secondly, Finns can show emotions more openly at work than Chinese. Thirdly, to some extent the authority dominates Chinese attitude towards work and personal life. In Chinese minds, the boss is superior to the employees at work, but they cannot ignore him outside the work either (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997, p. 87). However, Finns separate clearly the private space from the work. Additionally, the Chinese employees rely on their company for providing well-being like housing, etc. (p. 92). Last but not least, both Finns and Chinese think that the organizational structure is so that everyone knows how functions are distributed and coordinated, rather than know who has more authority over whom (p. 168).

To sum up, cultural studies are important to this thesis because not only culture and communication are inseparable, but also culture has huge influences on the greeting card selection that plays as the theme of the thesis. In the next section, cultural communication is the theme with the comparison of the cultural profile and business communication style between Finland and China, which serves as a basis for the first research question: "*Are cultural factors affecting the selection of greeting cards?*"

2.1.3 Intercultural business communication – Finland and China

The previous section is highly important to this part because conducting smooth intercultural business communication depends on how much a person knows the cultural things of a certain country. The communication cannot even get started without the knowledge of the cultures.

In this section, the national profiles and business communication of Finland and China are presented, focusing mostly on the macro-environment in terms of cultural theories that have been already stated in the previous sections as well as some other relevant studies.

2.1.3.1 Cultural profile and business communication of Finland in brief

❖**Finnish cultural values orientation**

According to Gore (2007), the Finnish attitude toward people's qualities as individuals is that people are inherently good. He reinforces his argument by exemplifying that Finnish law does not have a lifelong jail or capital punishment. That is to say, the legal system in Finland shows the belief that people are fundamentally "good" (see Table 4).

Table 4. Cultural Value Orientation (Gore 2007, p. 42)

Perception of	Dimensions of cultural orientation		
Individual	Good	Good and evil	Evil
Nature/World	Dominant	Harmonious	Submissive
Human relations	Individual	Laterally extended groups	Hierarchical groups
Activity	Doing	Controlling	Being
Time	Future	Present	Past
Space	Private	Mixed	Public

In terms of the orientation to nature and the world, Finns are seeking a harmonious balance between modern technology and nature. Human relations of Finnish culture tend to be individual even though seeking group consensus is highly appreciated. At least, people hope to be respected and appreciated for the individual achievements, not at the cost of group harmony. As for the culturally preferred type of activity, Finns are doing-oriented. When it comes to the time perception, Finns are very future-oriented. The past is gone, and they think more about what they will be doing tomorrow than simply feeling content or

regret today. With regard to their orientation to space, they belong to "mixed", both private and public (Gore 2007, p. 42-43, Table 4).

❖**Communication and negotiation style in Finland**

It is widely acknowledged that cross-cultural difference can make huge difference in communication and negotiation style between countries. The following summary is adapted from Metcalf, Bird, Shankarmahesh, Aycan, Lariomo and Valdelamar's (2006) research.

Finns show a strong orientation towards building a relationship when communicating and negotiating with others. They also demonstrate a great preference for win-win solution. Finns prefer an informal personal style, and like direct and simple communication. They get down to business right away, without small talks. Finnish communicators find it inappropriate to be late. Finland reports even a higher sensitivity toward time than US. In practical business communication, Finns tend to use objective facts rather than subjective feelings. They are serious and reserved. Some broad or vague contract language will be acceptable in Finland, but do remember always begin negotiations by discussing details of the project. Individuals are responsible for decisions, but leaders make the final decision. To identify and to set up a strong rapport with the leader are very important in Finland. In terms of risk-taking index, Finns belong to risk-averse people rather than risk-taker.

2.1.3.2 Cultural profile and business communication of China in brief

❖**High-context characteristics of Chinese culture**

The following characteristics of Chinese culture are formulated by Coates (2009). The communication style of Chinese culture is high context:

- Body language is extremely important.

- Status is extremely important.

- Saving face is very necessary.

- Building guanxi is more important than results.

- Famous quotes and proverbs are often injected into conversation and you are expected to interpret what is being intended.

- Chinese will never say no to a suggestion or a question, but will say that further study is required and will introduce ambiguity.

  (Coates 2009, p. 40)

In high-context cultures, people are closely involved with each other, and the huge amount of information can be contained in a simple sentence. People express their meanings and emotions implicitly. Coates (2009) lays a great emphasis on the importance of the high-context communication in Chinese culture, which is less direct than Western culture. She further elaborates that the high context has something to do with the contextualized communication environment in which some of the cultural behaviors are deeply implanted in Chinese minds because they know very clearly what to do and how to think from years of interaction with each other in such communication environments.

❖Communication and negotiation style in China

According to Chaney and Martin (2007, p. 102), the verbal style of Chinese culture has the following three characteristics:

- They understand or convey meanings indirectly. They use vague terms and double negative; even criticism is indirect.

- Harmony is very important. During negotiations, the Chinese state their position in such a way that seems repetitious. They do not change their point of view without discussing it with the group.

- They speak humbly and speak negatively of their supposedly meager skills and those of their subordinates and their family.

Non-verbal communication is also very important in Chinese culture. In some cultures, silence indicates lack of interests, dissent or even disapproval, so may people are very uncomfortable with silence. However, silence in China is associated with listening and thinking as well as politeness. Silence is highly valued especially on formal occasions. When invited to dinner or attending business meetings, it is strongly recommended to arrive early in order to show respect to the hosts. People usually shake hands with each other when they first meet. Touching, hugging and kissing are not very common when greeting (Chaney and Martin 2007, p. 131).

Chaney and Martin (2007) state that many westerners find it difficult to do business with the Chinese because they do not understand Chinese culture and its intrinsic difference between eastern and western mindsets. Chinese need a high degree of interpersonal interaction and know very much about the business partners. It is essential to develop a relationship with the Chinese; they believe this takes time and cannot be achieved in the meeting rooms alone (Owen, Javalgi, and Scherer 2007). Personal connections are the keys to business success in China. Finding a common friend to make introductions will help establish such relationships quicker. Chaney and Martin (2007) also present a very important characteristic about disagreement in their research:

> Chinese may not openly state everything during negotiations. They do use silence, postpone of the current discussion, or change the subject to indicate that they disagree with what is being proposed or said. However, disagreeing with a foreigner is acceptable because of the desire to reach a consensus. The more they are interested in an agreement, the more they entertain. When they are happy with an agreement, they will smile; however, very little negative emotion will be shown when there is disagreement. Disagreements are

handled politely, such as proposing an alternative. Chinese negotiators prefer face-to-face meetings over written communication (Ngai 2000 in Chaney and Martin 2007, p. 222).

In short summary, Chinese communication and negotiation style is indirect and highly relation-focused. Coates (2009) thinks of Chinese negotiations as patient, meandering, and vague. In China, "nothing is finalized until everything is finalized" (Coates 2009, p. 62) and "nothing is final until it is signed" (Chaney and Martin 2007, p. 222).

In the next section, the importance of greeting cards will be presented, which is highly linked with the cultural issues because people's decision on a certain type of card has something to do with the culture.

2.2 Value of greeting cards in business and relations

Many people may argue that the paper greeting cards will be obsolete in this information era. We can obtain electronic greeting cards that go faster and farther than the paper ones. Some people even claim that gifts may almost replace greeting cards sooner or later, as gifts tend to be kept longer than their counterparts. However, greeting cards have a lot of functions that the other ways of renewing relationships cannot replace.

The following facts and figures (Souvenirs, Gifts, & Novelties 2005) can prove the importance of greeting cards in today's world. 90% of all U.S. households join in the greeting cards category, buying more than one greeting card per year. 7 billion greeting cards are purchased by Americans every year, which generates up to $7.5 billion in retail sales. A person receives approximately 20 cards per year on average, which includes birthday cards, Christmas cards, and so on. The most popular holidays when people would receive greeting cards are in this order birthday (60%), Christmas Day (60%), Valentine's

Day (25%), Mother's Day (4%), Easter and Father's Day (3%) (Souvenirs, Gifts, & Novelties 2005, p. 102).

There are a lot of functions of greeting cards such as saying thank you, requesting appointment, etc. "The cards are a great follow-up for individuals on a job search or even as a communication with business friends. Anyone who needs to sell himself or herself can benefit from the lighthearted approach," said Randy Rosler, the founder of Intro Knocks to produce a variety of business greeting cards (Rubel 1995, p. 14). Interestingly, Rosler sent greeting cards rather than business cards to his business partners and clients, and the reponse rates boosted up to three times than normal. According to Rosler, Time Warner Communications adopted a kind of customized card from Intro Knocks to launch a new fiber-optic cable network in New York.

As pointed out by Dindia and Timmerman (2004), one of the communication behaviors to keep relationships is the holiday greeting card. Sigman (1991) said that the relationships are continuous even if people are not necessarily continuous in each other's presence, so he has developed a concept called Relational Continuity Constructional Units (RCCUs) to describe a situation that people construct the continuity of their relationships when they are not physically co-present.

Three categories of RCCUs are proposed by Sigman (1991), which is based on the temporal placement concerning the physical separation: prospective units, introspective units, and retrospective units.

Prospective units include behaviors that physical separation continues. Sometimes farewells are good examples of prospective units.

Introspective units include communication behavior that happens during physical separation of the relationship members. The purpose of this is to "constitute the relationship's continuity" (Sigman 1991, p. 115). There are three classes of introspective units. One is constructional artifact such as wedding bands. Constructional artifacts enable

partners to connect the continuity of their relationship by making use of symbols and signs which are familiar to each other as reminders of relationship existence. Another is a class of behaviors which promote the contacts between the relationship members, such as phone calls, greeting cards and letters, etc. This type of introspective RCCU can bridge the physical absence, and remain relationship continuity. The third is that relationship members can remind themselves of their relationships in spite of the absence of face-to-face contact, both behaviorally and cognitively. For instance, one method to maintain relationship is to talk with the person who has been absent from a certain relationship for a long time in order to remind how important the relationships are.

Retrospective units happen when people re-encounter each other after some time of absence. These behaviors are usually involved in greeting sections.

Therefore, Sigman (1991) mentioned that holiday greeting cards may function to keep relationships in two ways. One is by setting up contacts among individuals. The other is by reminding the individuals of the existence of the relationship by making use of a physical object.

The above statements all support the idea that greeting card is an effective tool to bridge the physical absence, and to maintain the relationship continuity. This is not only in the personal case, but also in the business context. Thus, greeting cards can construct the business relationship continuity as well. Moreover, this idea can be viewed as the foundation of the main research question: *What is the role of greeting cards in business communication and relations between Finnish and Chinese companies?*

2.3 Colors and images on the greeting cards

Our world is composed of countless images. "If there is one property that most clearly distinguishes pictures from language and from the other modes of human communication,

that property is iconicity." (Messaris 1997, p.3) Images are combined with lines, shapes, colors, etc., and carry a certain visual effects to our eyes. That is what the real world looks like.

Image is acutally complicated, and needs explanation. Different people would have different impressions and understandings towards the same picture due to the personality, cultural differences, educations, gender, surroundings, etc.

Interestingly, research shows that our physical world does not have color. The eye is like a complex receptor where the rods and cones in the retina respond to light and send signals to provide us with the colorful world. What we actually see are only light waves of different wavelengths, not the color itself. It is reported that our human eyes can see at least 7 million colors, but our brains are also sometimes confused with color (Paul and Okan 2010, p. 950). On the color spectrum, various colors are the products of different light wavelengths (Geboy 1996). According to Moster (2003), most researchers hold the view that there exist three primary colors (red, blue and green) and it is the interaction of their three basic attributes (hue, intensity and saturation) that are able to create various colors. Primary and secondary colors on the color wheel like red, yellow, blue, orange, green and purple, are considered as simple colors. All the others like taupe, mauve, sea green, maroon, pumpkin, etc. are regarded as complicated colors.

People's response to color is learned, not completely innate. Some studies have demonstrated that color perceptions are largely dependent on the geographical heritage, the sunlight exposure, and even the economic development (Paul and Okan 2010). Color influences the human mind and body in many different ways. That is to say, certain colors attract us while others repel (Geboy 1996). It has been pointed out that in some areas where sunlight is extremely bright, colors and contrasts decline in intensity. As a result, people who live closer to the equator have a more highly developed vision (more efficient rods in the retina). On the other hand, people from northern latitudes have developed a

more refined color vision as light is reflected indirectly (Paul and Okan 2010). Lyn Dally Geboy (1996) elaborates the same thing in a more systematic way as follows:

> "In general, colors at the warm end of the spectrum, like red, are more stimulating and exciting. The quieter, more soothing colors, blue, for example, fall at the spectrum's cool end. In terms of visibility, warmer colors outperform cooler ones, with yellow being most visible. 'Pure' colors have higher visibility than shades (color with black added) or tints (with white added). The higher the contrast between two colors, bright orange or yellow and black, the greater the visibility." (Geboy 1996, p. 52)

As is shown to us, color meanings vary between the geographic positions, let alone the cultural factors. Some research shows that images and colors are the truly great tools to help communicate complex information and even emotions. In this section, the importance of images and colors is presented. Additionally, the difference of color perceptions is also apparently varied among Chinese and Finns. In this section, the function of color and images is discussed. Finally, color perceptions by Chinese and Finns are deeply explained.

2.3.1 Color conveys a better message

Color is usually associated with emotion, so color can help communicate complex information by invoking some emotional responses. Actually, color plays an important supporting role in communicating the message on a deeper level (Geboy 1996). There already exist many studies relating color, and a great number of different viewpoints regarding an individual's response to color and human behavior that are considered explaining the communication value of color.

Paul and Okan (2010) as well as Aslam (2006) state that there are two major schools of thought relating color and human behavior. Color reaction could be of innate or instinctual origin (Humphrey 1976); however, it could also be of learned or associative origin

(Langenbeck 1913, cited in Hupka et al., 1997). The following statement is the key idea quoted from Aslam's study (2006, p. 17-18).

> "The first school argues that color signals the brain to trigger an affective reaction directly, whereas others suggest that color preferences are learned over time as shared affective meanings or as result of past experiences or as conscious associations in language, literature and myths."

Crozier (1996) argues that the difference in latent philosophical-religious attitudes is much more than the innate difference in the perception of colors in terms of the differences in color associations. He reinforces his argument by exemplifying color cultural difference between Hindus and Buddhist monks and Zambians. The orange color is considered sacred for Hindus and Buddhist monks, but Zambians never consider it a separate color at all (reported in Aslam 2006, p. 18; Madden et al., 2000). Some other scholars suggest that the communication value of colors should be influenced by demographic factors such as age, sex and even ethnicity (Paul and Okan 2010, p. 951). McCracken (1988) points out that people's recognition of color associations should be traced back to earlier human history when humans associated black or dark blue with night or passiveness, and bright yellow with sunlight and with alertness and arousal (reported in Paul and Okan 2010, p. 951).

Colors convey a certain meaning, and influence both human behavior and human physiology (Madden 2000). When Ward (1995, p. 3) was asked how to lower stress in the workplace, he simply replied, "paint the walls—the right colors in the right place can make an exciting or calming difference" (reported in Madden, Hewett and Roth 2000, p. 92). Blue is the most highly evaluated color, followed by green and white (p. 92). Blue is also the most frequently used color in corporate America – logos, brands, and packaging (Paul and Okan 2010, p. 953). Blue is associated with wealth, trust, and security (Madden Hewett and Roth 2000, p. 91), which explains why banks and airline companies like to color their logos blue such as Nordea Bank and Finnair. Wexner (1954) summarizes the overall color meanings in his study. He notes that "red is associated with exciting-stimulating, orange

with distressed-disturbed-upset, blue with tender-smoothing, purple with dignified-stately, yellow with cheerful-jovial, and black with powerful-strong-masterful." (p. 434)

In order to exam the communication values of color, Aslam (2006) uses country-culture clusters (Ronen and Shenkar 1985) based on the language and communication similarities to explain the meanings and associations of colors in the selected clusters, shown by Table 5 (Aslam 2006, p. 19).

Table 5. The cross-cultural spectrum of meanings and associations of color in marketing (adapted from Aslam 2006, p. 19)

Country-Culture Cluster						
Colour	Anglo-Saxon	Latin	Nordic	Chinese	Japanese	Korean
White	Purity Happiness	-	-	Death Mourning	Death Mourning	Death Mourning
Blue	High quality Corporate Masculine	-	Cold Masculine	High quality Trustworthy	High quality Trustworthy	High quality Trustworthy
Green	Envy Good taste	Envy	-	Pure Reliable	Love Happy	Pure Adventure
Yellow	Happy Jealousy	Envy Infidenlity	-	Pure Good taste Royal Authority	Envy Good taste	Happiness Good taste
Red	Masculine Love Lust Fear Anger	Masculine	Positive	Love Happiness Lucky	Love Anger Jealousy	Love Adventure Good taste
Purple	Authority Power	-	-	Expensive Love	Expensive Sin Fear	Expensive Love
Black	Expensive Fear Grief	Fear Anger Grief	-	Expensive Powerful	Expensive Powerful	Expensive Powerful

At the first glance of the table, Asians have more abundant meanings than Europeans, and each color has multiple indications. Blue has the same meaning to Chinese, Japanese and Korean, but totally different towards Nordic countries. Red almost has the same situation as blue. Few indications here are available to the Nordic sense of colors like white, green, yellow, black, etc., but more research is done for the color meanings in the following subsections.

2.3.2 Chinese color perception

Table 7 demonstrates almost all the common colors we usually see in our everyday life. The "Chinese" column of the table only lists the main points of each color. In this part, the potential meanings of each color have been elaborated. Kirsi Kommonen (2011), researcher from Aalto University, is an expert in color culture field. She combines color meanings with Chinese value in her research. The following explanations of colors are mostly based on her study.

Red

Red represents happiness in Chinese minds. Chinese love red very much as it is associated with celebrations. In the ancient times, the bridal wedding gown is in red. Traditionally, red can be used to ward off evil. For instance, people have a 'bad luck year' in every 12 years. In this bad year, people should wear red underwear to keep away from evil (p. 371).

Black

Black has several meanings in China, and most of them are positive such as dependability, trustworthiness and high quality. Black is also regarded as powerful and expensive in China (Aslam 2006, p. 20). Additionally, "black on red signifies happiness to Chinese people, and therefore the color combination is commonly used for wedding invitations (Madden, Hewett, and Roth 2000, p. 93) ". However, in Chinese tradition people usually wear in black to attend funerals. Dressing in colors is considered extremely offensive and impolite.

Yellow

Yellow expresses pleasant, happy, good taste, royalty and authority in China (Paul and Okan 2010, p. 953). Why royalty and authority? In old China, the emperor was the only one who could wear in yellow. The worst punishment of these violators could be sentenced to death. Furthermore, yellow represents gold as a color, so it is the color of richness (Kommonen 2011, p. 372).

White

White is a controversial color in contemporary China. On the one hand, people would dress in white when someone passed away. On the other hand, white also represents purity like bridal wedding gown. China is a highly westernized country. White wedding gown is a case in point (p. 372).

Green

Green is the color of vital force (Kommonen 2011, p. 372). To Chinese, green also denotes sincerity, trustworthiness and dependability (Paul and Okan 2010, p. 953; Aslam 2006, p. 20).

Blue

Blue is a very nature typed color, representing the sky and ocean. In Qing Dynasty, people firmly believed that the emperor is the son of heaven, so the Temple of Heaven that is located in the capital Beijing is also in blue (Kommonen 2011, p. 372). In China, blue means upscale, trustworthy, high quality (Aslam 2006, p. 20). Interestingly, sometimes blue is also the color of sadness in a certain situation.

The national flag of China is in red and yellow. Its full name is called "five-star red flag" (see Figure 1). The foundation of China is through hardship of civil wars. The red color denotes that the flag is dyed by the soldiers' blood. The biggest star represents the Communist Party, and the rest of four stars that

Figure 1. The National Flag of China

surround the big star mean people. Therefore, from the color of national flag we can see the importance of red in Chinese minds.

2.3.3 Finnish color perception

Koivusalo's (2011) research is in the field of colors and images' effect on visual communication on websites. She elaborates the color perceptions of Finnish culture according to Loiri and Juholin's (1998, p. 111-112) research. She mentions that Finns are used to associating certain objects with specific colors. For example, hospitals use green color in order to create a calming effect. Post offices are painted orange, which also has a certain meaning behind it. Koivusalo (2011) analyzes the following five colors that have been perceived important in Finnish minds (p. 17).

Yellow

Yellow is usually connected with sunshine, warmth and intimacy. Moreover, yellow has a strong message because "yellow press" stands for the attention color. When the use of yellow is isolated from other colors, it seems very dull and ineffective. However, if it is combined with dark and powerful colors, it can be very effective.

Green

Green offers the feeling of calming down and is regarded as the color of nature. It symbolizes regeneration. Green has also something to do with the current political issues. Sometimes two important parties are involved like the Greens of Finland, or the Central Party. Green is also closely related to the environmental organization Greenpeace.

Blue

Blue is associated with the sky, snowdrifts, water and ice. It is generally accepted that the popularity of light blue results from the arrival of television in the 1950's. The living rooms were always colored with light blue when the television monitor was showing the color.

Black

Black is a fancy color, associated with style, dignity and quality. In Finnish culture, it is also a color of grief and mourning. It is easy to combine black with other colors like light and dark ones, or bright and dim ones.

White

White is always associated with cleanliness and virginity, but it refers to ceremonies and festivities sometimes. Whiteness is the only special characteristic that white has while other colors don't. For example, the whiteness of a paper or laundry can be either a negative or a positive factor.

Red

According to Loiri and Juholin's (1998, p. 111) studies of Finnish perception on colors, red can symbolize revolution. At the same time it also means war and peace, love and passion, as well as fire. Red is also the color of warning. Purple (Purppuranpunainen), a special red color, is associated with power, strength and respect in Finnish minds. Red is considered a stimulant effect in some cases.

Blue is the color for the Finns, just as red is to the Chinese. We can see the importance of white and blue in Finnish minds from their national flag (see Figure 2). The colors on the flag are claimed to represent the blue of the lakes and the white snow of the winters (The Finnish tourist board 2004).

Figure 2. The National Flag of Finland

2.3.4 Images on the greeting cards

Images and pictures have a substantial importance on the greeting cards. For instance, the amount of information carried by a picture can be written down with several pages. According to Lane (1991), colors are associated with certain images. Hence, images convey

message together with colors, and both of them are combined with each other. People would have different moods when living in a room painted with red from blue, the same room but different color, then different moods. The red room could arouse you of chocolate and wine with passion, while the blue room could be associated with music and snow with calm.

According to Koivusalo (2011, p. 26) whose study is based on Loiri and Juholin (1998, p. 53), one of the purposes of an image is to explain and elaborate the issues even further. Images might only support the visual effects or modify the overall layout, but it is always the main contributor to convey message. When using an image, the user must know clearly the purpose and the reason of using a certain image. Messaris (1997) supports the idea that "if pictures were a language that had to be learned just as much as any verbal language does, then we certainly should expect images to mean nothing to viewers who were not familiar with the particular representational conventions through which those images were created (p. 92)". Images are profound. A person cannot elaborate a picture very well without understanding the background or even the history of the image. Additionally, the user should pay a great attention to the color of the image. As mentioned above, different colors can carry different information and feelings to the viewers. Interestingly, it is reported that the pictures with black and white receive more attention from audiences and are more effective to deliver the desired message (Loiri and Juholin 1998, p. 54).

Furthermore, the use of image should take into account the culture background. The picture considered meaningful in one culture might make no sense at all in the other. It is also caused by other factors other than the cultural differences like the lack of previous knowledge, etc (Messaris 1997, p. 102). In cultural practice, the intepretation of the same image can vary between countries (p. 103). Actually, the cultural value is shown in the process of intepretation. This cross-cultural communicational problem has been already heatedly discussed in the advertising field. US ads tend to use individualistic appeals, while Korea is more likely to use collective appeals, which reflects the fundamental culture values between the group-focus tendency and the personal independence emphasis (p. 110).

In order to explain this point further, namely images associated with culture, the cultural references of American Spring Break is necessary to give. A viewer from other countries must be missing some points of the image (Figure 3). The Iwo Jima's flag-raising action has been widely shown in movies or other media, of course international audiences included, but its recurring cultural symbol is only limited to the Americans. According to Messaris (1997), "the concept of spring break as major party time is distinctively American and has few direct equivalents in other parts of the world (p. 94)." Therefore, a viewer from other countries is very likely to find the potential meaning of the image somewhat ambiguous.
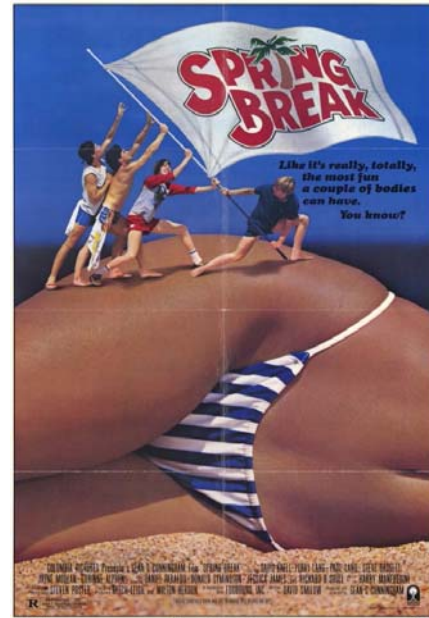
Figure 3. Spring Break

Sometimes images on the greeting cards also have texts to explain further. It is reported that 24% of the images on the magazines needs the accompanying text in order to be understood (Messaris 1997, p. 221). Due to the lack of explicitness of the visual syntax, words are usually supporting the arguments that images are supposed to show (Meyers, 1994, Chap. 10 in Messaris 1997, p. 219). Therefore, the figure shows that a large number of images still need verbal explanation. Otherwise, they cannot function very well without texts. As Messaris (1997) sums up, "the images supply the concrete examples that make the verbal argument more compelling (p. 222)."

In short summary, image with further explanation is very important. Otherwise, even very simple picture can be extremely confusing because everyone reads and understands the image differently. Image is always associated with culture.

2.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this research is based on the earlier discussion of the literature. In order to clarify the framework, it is divided into four figures. The rest three figures function to elaborate the first main figure. Figure 4 illustrates that cultural difference is the biggest communicational barrier between Chinese and Finnish companies. The culture values of the two counterparts have already thoroughly described in the subsection 2.2 based on many prestigious scholars' research such as Hall (1990), Chaney and Martin (2007), Hofstede (2001), and so on. After greeting cards are adopted, the business communication is once again established. The importance of greeting cards that are usually sent during holidays has discussed in the subsection 2.2. Also, the two important issues of greeting cards, the image and the color, have been stated accordingly in the subsection 2.3.
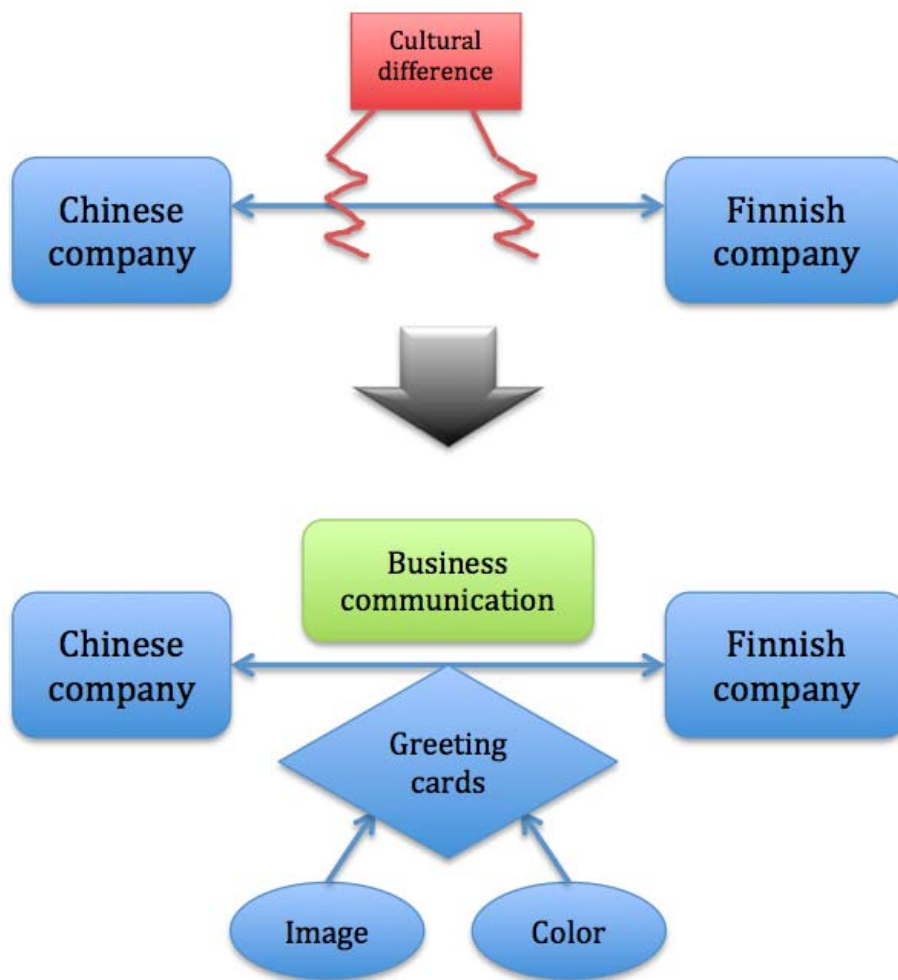
Figure 4. Theoretical framework of the present study

The second figure (figure 5) demonstrates the color perceptions of Chinese people, which is largely based on Kommonen's (2011) study, as well as other researchers' work. Kommonen (2011) elaborates the meaning and the indication of red, yellow, white, green and blue. When it comes to black, it derives from more internationalized point of view.
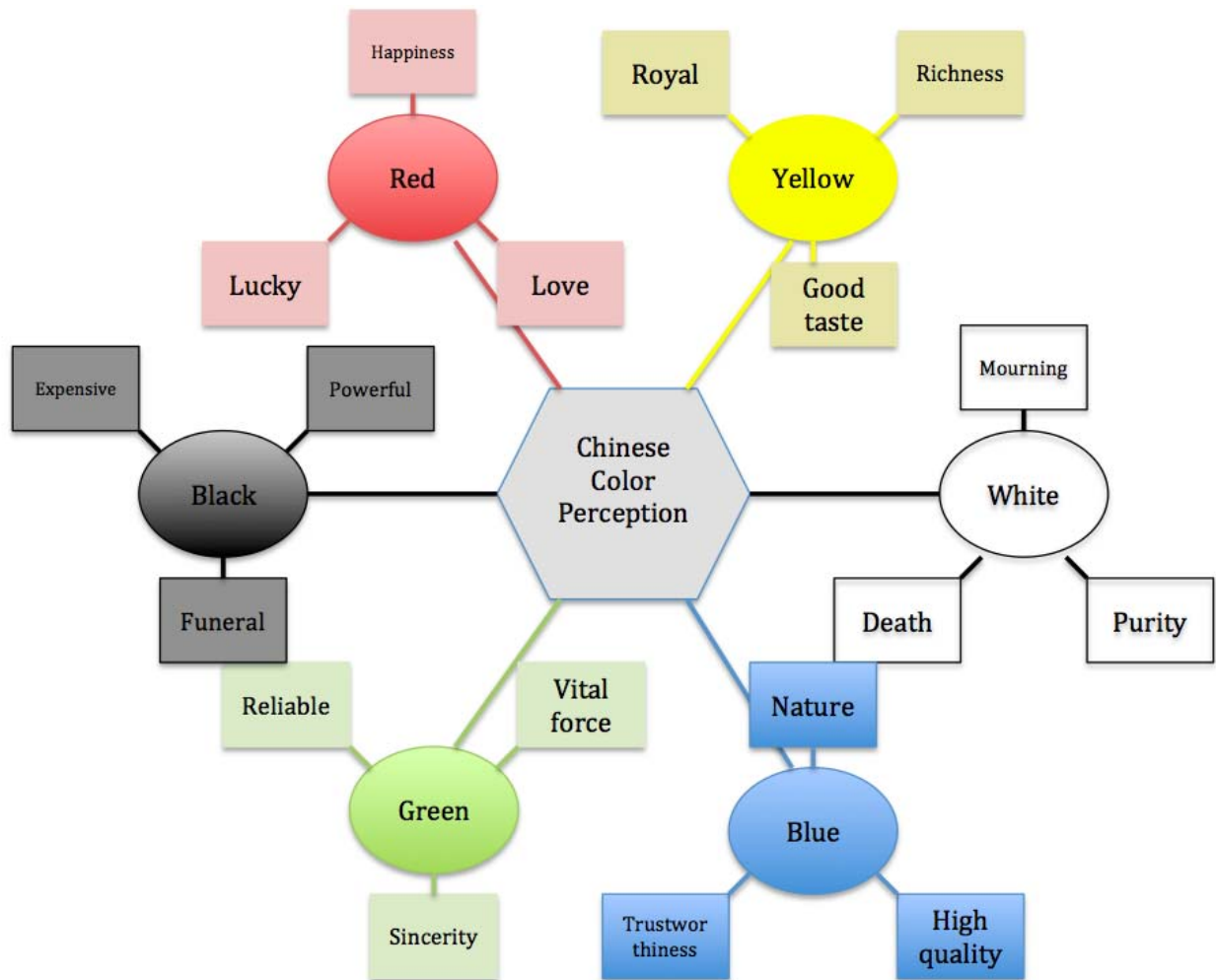
Figure 5. Theoretical framework: Chinese color perception

The third figure (Figure 6) tries to illustrate the Finnish color perception based on Loiri and Juholin's (1998) studies, which have been stated in the subsection 2.3.3. It is obvious from Figure 6 that Finnish people have more indications from each color. Some are similar to Chinese, but some are totally different from its Chinese counterpart.
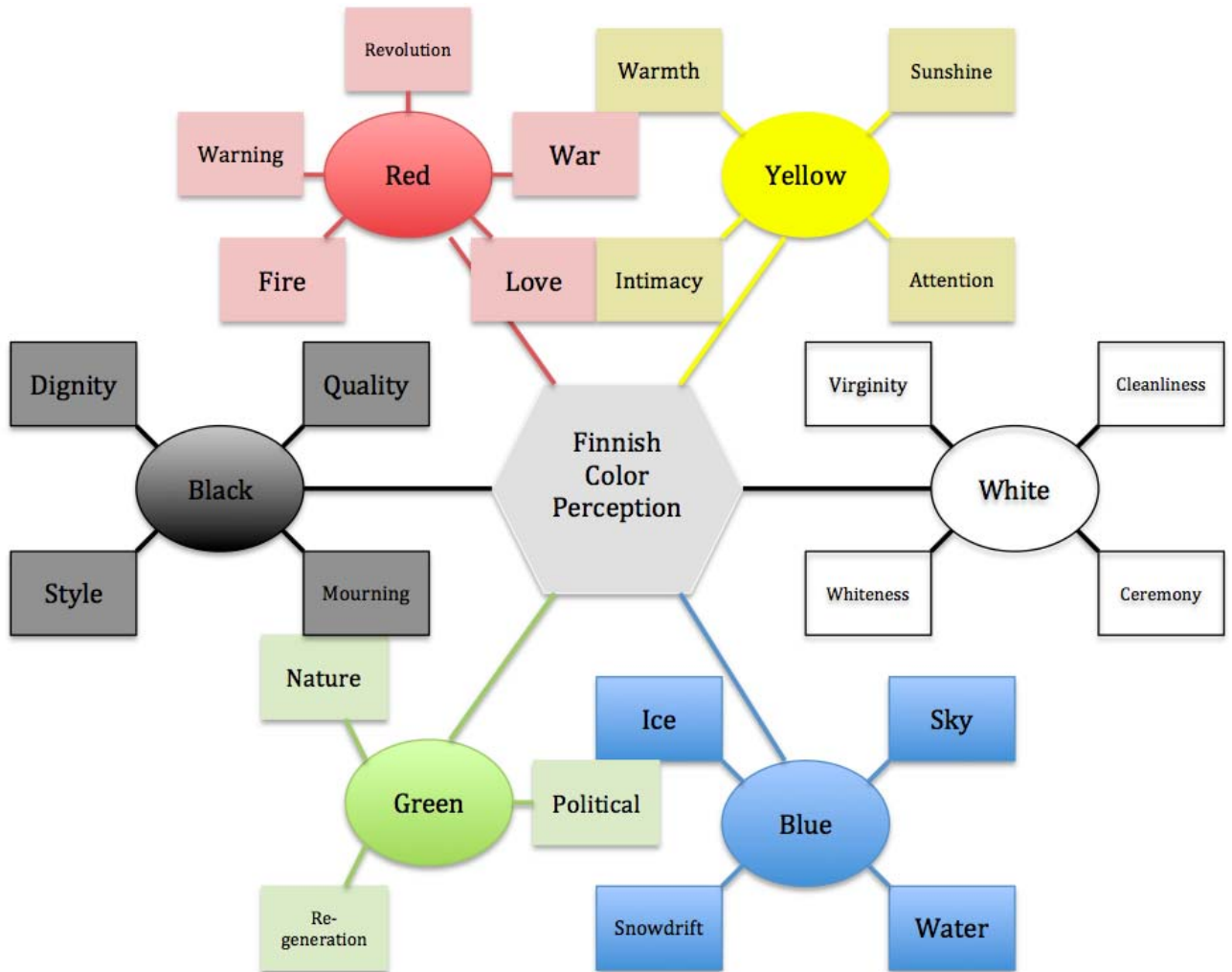
Figure 6. Theoretical framework: Finnish color perception (adapted from Loiri and Juholin 1998, p. 111 and Koivusalo 2011, p. 25)

The last figure (Figure 7) shows that there are three factors affecting the selection of greeting cards: culture, color and image. Culture is the most critical one, and also influences the color and the image perceptions. As presented earlier already, the purpose of the study is to find out whether greeting cards have positive effects on business communication and relation, so it is highly necessary to make a deeper analysis on the card-related issues such as culture, color, and image.
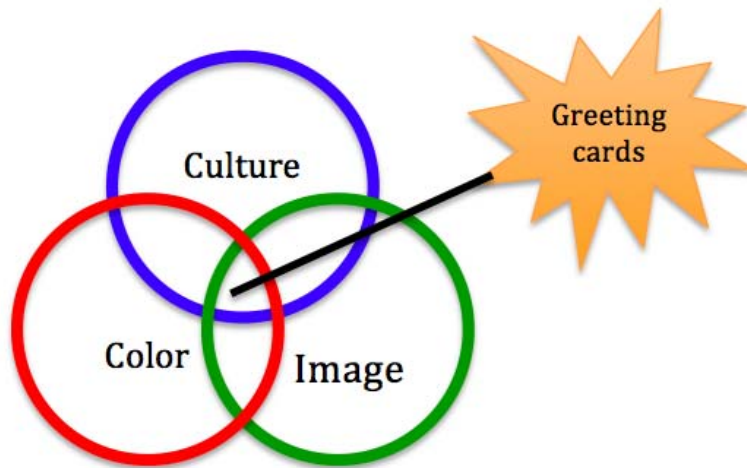
Figure 7. Theoretical framework: three factors deciding the greeting cards

These four figures establish the theoretical framework that is also regarded as a fundamental base of the study. The framework is very clear and simple but of vitally important because it serves as a basis for the main research question as well as the two sub-questions:

"What is the role of greeting cards in business communication and relation between Finnish and Chinese companies?"

Sub-question 1: *"Are culture factors affecting the selection of greeting cards?"*

Sub-question 2: *"What is the preferred image of greeting cards in business contexts?"*

Sub-question 2: *"What is the preferred color of greeting cards in business contexts?"*

3. METHODS AND DATA

This chapter demonstrates the selected research methods and the data of the present study. This chapter has three sections. Firstly, the research methods of the study are concretely introduced. Secondly, the data as well as their collecting process are stated. Last but not least, the trustworthiness of the thesis is discussed.

3.1 Research methods

This study takes the qualitative approach. According to Maybut and Morehouse (1994), "qualitative researchers value context sensitivity, that is, understanding a phenomena in all its complexity and within a particular situation and environment. The quantitative researchers work to eliminate all of the unique aspects of the environment in order to apply the results to the largest possible number of subjects and experiments" (p. 13). Since this study aims to identify the role of greeting cards in business communication and relations that usually involve the culture-related factors, the qualitative research approach is much more appropriate than quantitative one. In order to meet the objectives of the present study, qualitative interview is adopted in this empirical research.

Interviews as the research methods are chosen to answer the following research questions as follows:

"What is the role of greeting cards in business communication and relation between Finnish and Chinese companies?"
Sub-question 1: *"Are culture factors affecting the selection of greeting cards?"*
Sub-question 2: *"What is the preferred color of greeting cards in business contexts?"*
Sub-question 3: *"What is the preferred image of greeting cards in business contexts?"*

Some theoretical studies have already been stated in the Literature Review. They have dealt with topics as cultural factors on business communication, value of greeting cards, image

and color in greeting cards, etc., and they can be seen as theoretical supports for the interview contents. According to Maybut and Morehouse (1994), the goal of qualitative research is to find out what appears after close observation, careful documentation, and concrete analysis. In this study, a semi-structured interview is used, which requires two-way communication. In this present study, the interview method is more effective than other qualitative methods because the study has a lot of 'what' and 'how' questions and needs business professionals' descriptions. A semi-structured interview is also a guided interview with issues and themes fixed, but is not limited to the topic itself.

Importantly, the interviews take place in two categories: pilot interviews and theme interviews, which is actually how the data are acquired. The purpose of the pilot interview is to find out whether greeting cards have something to do with business communication. Otherwise, all the further research becomes meaningless. In addition, the theme interviews concentrate on the role of greeting cards in business communication and relations, and whether positive impacts exist in sending the cards. At the end of each interview, the interviewees are requested to choose their preferred image and color on the greeting cards as well as the reason why they choose the certain image and color. Furthermore, to carefully select senior and experienced professionals is a good way to get comprehensive and profound knowledge (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, p. 47-48). Therefore, the interviewees selected are all from international companies with several years' experience in the business field.

After each interview, the contents of the interview are completely transcribed into texts so that a more comprehensive view of the data can be shown. The interviews which are held in Chinese are translated into English, and those held in English are merely transcribed.
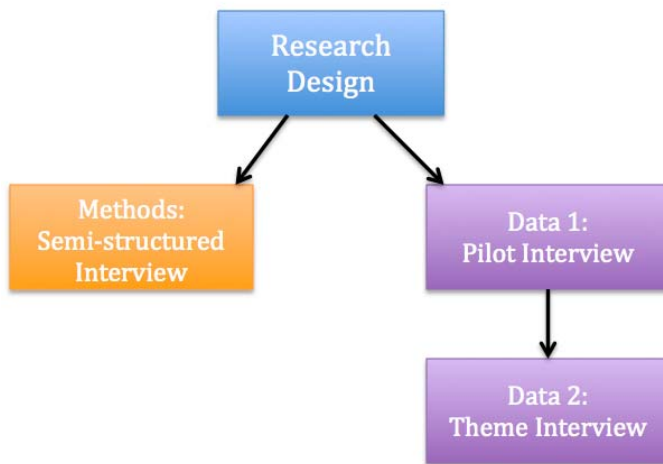
Figure 8: Research Design

Figure 8 illustrates an overview of the research design that contains both the method and the data. The method of the study is the semi-structured interview, and the data come from two types of interviews: pilot interview and theme interview.

3.2 Research data

In this section, the research data is presented through pilot interviews and theme interviews. The broad pilot interviews are mainly to answer the relationship between greeting cards and business communication in the Finnish-Chinese companies. The theme interviews lead to an in-depth understanding of the way how a certain image and color is decided on the greeting cards, the message left in the cards, the connection of business service and greeting cards, etc.

3.2.1 Pilot interview

Pilot study is very necessary for this topic. If greeting cards would have nothing to do with business communication, the core aim of the study, all the further research would be in vain. According to Yin (2003, p. 79), a pilot study is like "laboratory" for the research because once looking at the same phenomena from different angles, totally different conclusions can be drawn. In other words, the pilot study is to find out whether it is necessary to launch a certain research.

Totally four pilot interviews were conducted, all taking place in Shanghai in summer 2012. All interviews were face-to-face in the interviewees' workplaces. Since the four interviewees were Chinese people, the interviews were done in Chinese. The four companies are ABB, Maersk Line, Nielsen, and UPM respectively, which have been originated from Switzerland, Denmark, the United States, and Finland, but have offices both in Finland and China (see Table. 6). Additionally, UPM is a Finnish company with offices in several cities in China. Three interviews were tape-recorded but one did not allow to record by tape. All the interviews were transcribed in a couple of days.

Table 6. Overview of Interviewees (Pilot Interview)

Interviewee	Company name	Position of interviewee	Duration	Tape-recorded
Queenie Qi	ABB	Senior Sales Representative	12:35	Yes
Laura Xiao	Maersk Line	Assistant to Managing Director	13:34	Yes
Hao Sun	Nielsen	Customer Service Manager	11:15	Yes
Liuzi Yang	UPM	Executive of Marketing Dept.	around 15:00	No

The pilot interviews are built around two themes in accordance with research objectives and additionally to answer the main research question: *What is the role of greeting cards in business communication and relations between Finnish and Chinese companies?* The interview themes can be found in Appendix 1. As is shown in Appendix 1, one theme focuses on whether greeting cards have a positive relation with business communication. The other theme mostly concerns the role palyed by greeting cards and gifts in holidays. In

short, it is used to compare greeting cards with gifts, whether one outweighs the other when involving in maintaining the business relations and communication.

3.2.2 Theme interview

In this study, totally four in-depth theme interviews are conducted, which aims to answer the three sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: *"Are culture factors affecting the selection of greeting cards?"*
Sub-question 2: *"What is the preferred color of greeting cards in business contexts?"*
Sub-question 3: *"What is the preferred image of greeting cards in business contexts?"*

The objective of the four theme interviews is to figure out why the people from Chinese or Finnish company would choose a certain image rather than others. Is it because of cultural issues or business background? Why a certain color would be so popular among the certain culture? Could it be possible that the people's preference on color would change when adapting to another culture for long?

The quality of theme interviews is extremely important because the conclusions to be drawn are greatly based on them. In order to guarantee the accuracy of the data from interviews, tape-recorded method is used whenever it is possible.

Three theme interviews were all held in Helsinki, but one in Shanghai. The interview in Shanghai was conducted in February 2013, while the other three theme interviews had been completed by the end of year 2012. All were face-to-face in the interviewees' workplaces. However, two of the interviewees did not allowed to tape-record the interview contents. Also, none of them were willing to disclose their real names to public, so here Interview A, Interview B, Interview C, and Interview D are marked in the Table 7. All these four interviewees were male. Two were Finnish, and two were Chinese. Similarly, only one of them did not allow to disclose the position.

Table 7. Overview of Interviewees (Theme Interview)

Interviewee	Company name	Position of Interviewee	Nationality	Tape-recorded
Interviewee A	Eficode	N/A	Chinese	Yes
Interviewee B	Enonymous IT company	Employee Engagement Manager	Finnish	No
Interviewee C	Enonymous IT company	Communication Coordinator	Finnish	No
Interviewee D	Glaston	Regional Sales Manager	Chinese	Yes

All these four interviews were scheduled to take around one hour. In practice, one-hour time fits well for each interview. As well as the pilot study, all the interviews here are semi-structured, so the interviewees were free to add anything that was important to their points of view. Two theme interviews were conducted in English with Finnish interviewees while the other two were in Chinese. Here, two interviews were tape-recorded. The transcription was done within a couple of days.

3.3 Validity and reliability

This section discusses the validity and reliability of the research method and data. Generally speaking, the validity of the research and reliability of the results are required to evaluate in the process in order to guarantee the scientific trustworthiness (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2001, p. 213, adapted from Ruotsalainen 2010, p. 54).

Validity issues are seriously considered in the research. In order to avoid mixing up concepts, definition of greeting card and business card is clearly differentiated at the beginning of the study. Actually, in the interviews, both pilot interviews and theme interviews, such concepts were also explained to the interviewees to make sure that the interviewees could state the most accurate and objective view on the greeting cards' effects.

Before interviews were conducted, another very important step had to be done: to collect background information of a certain company and to identify whether the company is really a target company. Invalidity might happen when the branch office has domestic business only. From micro level, choosing the qualified interviewees really counts. The interviewees should have several years' work experience in the business communication and marketing-related fields. If the experience is not enough, the data collected will not be accurate enough. Furthermore, since the study involves Finnish and Chinese companies only, the interviewees selected should be either Finnish or Chinese due to the cultural issues. People of other nationalities cannot reflect the validity of the research results even if they work in the Finnish or Chinese company for many years.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduce another way to assess the trustworthiness of the qualitative research method: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (adapted from Cai 2009, p. 45). "Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a 'credible' conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data. Transferability is the degree to which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project. Dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Conformability is a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected" (p. 45-46).

This study satisfies the criteria well set by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Firstly, the data collected from the interviews are original because the interview questions that were sent to the interviewees beforehand are made by the author. Secondly, the results and findings from the interviews can be applied not only to these case companies but also other Finnish-Chinese joint ventures that involve relevant business types, so the application of greeting cards is not restricted. Thirdly, the quality of the data process and analysis is highly reliable. The purpose of sending interview questions to the interviewees is to give them enough time to think about the answers. Also, the data analysis is based on the literature review that has already been stated earlier.

43

Fourthly, besides interviews, those business experts who are either Chinese or Finnish, also told the author about their own experiences that seem viable in theory but not in practice. The conclusion is that only practically viable data can support the findings. The current study is based on these 'practical' data from beginning to end. As a result, the research achieves a high degree of reliability.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the study derived from the interviews. The objective of the study is to find out the role that greeting cards play in the business communication and relation between Finnish and Chinese companies. In order to solve this problem, we should answer the three sub-research questions first because the sub-questions are formed in the way that demonstrates the most obvious and critical characters of the main research question.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Each section answers a sub-question. The last section summarizes the main points of the role of greeting cards, which is largely based on the results derived from the sub-questions.

4.1 Sub-question 1: Cultural factor affects the selection of greeting cards

This section is the surface part of the findings, which starts from the cultural issues. It functions well as the ground for the further analysis and leads the core contents of the study, image and color.

4.1.1 Main Finnish-Chinese cultural issues in business communication

In this section, the two most important and apparent issues are presented: directness/indirectness and hierarchy/heterarchy. These two aspects must be paid extra attention to the business communication among Finnish and Chinese companies.

Directness versus Indirectness

The issue of directness and indirectness is the most obvious fact that can be seen from interviews with Finns and Chinese. When asked "yes" or "no" questions, Finnish

interviewees prefer to tell "yes" or "no" at the beginning, and then explain the reasons. Finns always answer directly what you ask. They rarely grasp unrelated things against topics. On the other hand, almost all the Chinese interviewees avoid telling directly the answer "yes" or "no", but elaborating the reasons first. Finnish conversation mode is more like linear type, while Chinese mode is screw type.

"Our habits and education tell us how to become a more logical person: always from minor to major, from general to specific, reason first and summary later. When we request something, background information and main reasons should always be given first in order to get understanding or even sympathy from others", said the Chinese interviewee D.

Interestingly, regarding the same question, the Finnish interviewee C shows the opposite viewpoints. She mentions that Finns get used to state the main points at the beginning, namely the topic sentences. They develop the further message based on the topic sentences. In the same way, when asked 'Do you like…', Finns would answer 'Yes, I do' or 'No, I don't' at first and then tell the actual reasons why they are saying so.

The Finnish interviewee B said that why Finns tend to show the topic sentences first is to attract the listeners' attention.

During the interviews, all the interviewees are requested to compose a sentence with "he cannot go to school today" and "he is sick". The four sentences below are the answers given by the four interviewees.

Interviewee A: Because he is sick, he cannot go to school today. (in Chinese)

Interviewee B: He cannot go to school today because he is sick. (in English)

Interviewee C: He cannot go to school today as he is sick. (in English)

Interviewee D: He is sick, so he cannot go to school today. (in Chinese)

Interviewee A and D are Chinese, and interviewee B and C are Finns. It is so obvious from their answers that Finns tend to demonstrate the result first while Chinese prefer to state the reason first. In this sense, Finnish communication is more directness-driven, while Chinese communication is more indirectness-driven.

Hierarchy versus Heterarchy

Hierarchy/heterarchy aspect is another big issue that has been found important in business communication between Finnish and Chinese company. With respect to the greeting card sending, it also has to do with addressing the receivers' name and titles. Due to huge cultural difference between these two nations, people from heterarchical nation must be verbally careful when communicating with their counterparts from hierarchical nation. Similarly, people from hierarchical nation cannot behave over-free at will or even offensively to the other because your colleagues also cherish respects.

According to Oxford Dictionary, "hierarchy" is defined as "*a system in which members of an organization or society are ranked according to relative status or authority*". By comparison, the definition of "heterarchy" from Wikipedia is "*a system of organization replete with overlap, multiplicity, mixed ascendancy, and/or divergent-but-coexistent patterns of relation, in which each element shares the same 'horizontal' position of power and authority*" (Wikipedia, accessed on 1.3.2013). From the earlier review of literature as well as the interview results, Chinese are more hierarchy-oriented and Finns are more heterarchy-oriented.

Interviewee D said:

You cannot change the strict hierarchical reality in China, but accept it.

Hierarchy shows a certain extent of respect, which is extremely important in China. Moreover, hierarchy carries the benefits not only from respectfulness, but also easier way

to achieve the goal. Chinese lay much more emphasis on team work than individual work because networks or even family connections can save more time to fulfill a result than individual efforts.

Additionally, Chinese working atmosphere is more tense than the Finnish. Once the management makes the decision, few lower staff can stop it unless by collective protests. Employees rarely point out the superior's faults or mistakes in public or through group discussion. Rather, they prefer to adopt a milder way such as a face-to-face small talk in order to save the superior's face.

However, interviewee B mentioned the Finnish working environment, which is somewhat different from Chinese in this aspect.

Hierarchy is not that observed in Finnish work place.

In the Finnish culture, individual action and independent thinking are highly encouraged. Once doing team work, group discussion is considered important, and Finns hope that all the necessary issues can be figured out through discussion, rather than by small talk with superiors individually. Employees can point out colleagues' mistakes freely, which may result to heated debate or even controversy, but they never take it personally.

Interviewee D also said,

When sending greeting cards to senior staff with higher position, never forget to add the titles first before their names

Generally speaking, it is very impolite when inferiors send cards to their superiors without mentioning their titles in China. Calling senior people's full names directly is also considered rude. As for the younger staff, at least 'Mr.' or 'Ms' is addressed before their names to show respect and friendliness. To the contrary, Finland is like most Scandinavian countries. Calling people with the first name is very natural. When sending greeting cards during holiday, it is enough to mention the recipients' first names. However, over-formal is

always better than over-casual. It is strongly recommended to address the receivers´ title on the business greeting card even if to the Finnish receivers, such as "Mr. and Mrs. Nieminen".

4.1.2 Type of greeting cards

From both pilot and theme interviews, almost all the interviewees mentioned the existence of the paper card and the electronic card and on most occasions, they also use both of them, which leads to controversial discussions on the pros and cons of the two types.

On the one hand, some interviewees advocate that e-cards are more commonly used. They are more convenient and environmentally friendly, which largely matches the corporate value.

Laura Xiao from Maersk Line said:

Our company used to adopt e-card only before 2011. We attempted to use paper card after that, but I don't think our greeting routine will turn to paper card in the future as it goes against the core value of our company.

Maersk Line is not the only company that is concerned with the environmental issue. Such companies as ABB, UPM, and some others refuse to use paper cards mostly because of this reason.

According to these interviewees, e-cards have a lot more benefits than paper cards other than environmental issues. Firstly, it is more convenient. E-cards can be sent at any time wherever you are as long as you access computer, phone or other electronic devices. You do not have to buy the stamp and post it, and it actually saves a lot of time. Secondly, it is cost-saving. It does not cost a lot for one card with one stamp, but what about 1000 deliveries with postage, especially including outbound deliveries and labor costs for the card design? Thirdly, it is instant delivery. During holidays, post services are always

delayed. It happens that the receivers have not got the greeting cards until the Christmas is over, but sending e-cards can completely avoid this problem. Last but not least, another advantage over paper card is the sound effects. Readers might be much more emotionally reading the cards when they hear the music. This advantage is more beneficial for the senders.

On the other hand, some interviewees consistently argue that the paper card plays better in the interpersonal and emotional connection than the electronic card.

Interviewee D, a Chinese sales manager, stated more about the Chinese situation:

E-cards indeed are more convenient, but the problem is... many Chinese people don't check email every day. To be honest, I think paper cards are more easily accepted by Chinese people because Chinese also pay a lot of attention to the emotional communication.

China has a five-thousand-year history. Sending books and letters plays a role like "affectional tie" in Interviewee D's words, namely emotional communication, which deeply shows that "I want to keep a good and long relationship with you" in Chinese mind. To the contrary, e-cards symbolize the fast-food culture, to speed up, to simplify, and to move ahead. People tend to pursue the outcome itself but underestimate the importance of the process, which is the bad side of the fast economic development.

Interviewee D also exemplified some drawbacks of electronic cards:

Sometimes people would think of electronic cards as junk mail. I should say that on most occasions, people wouldn't have a look at it at all because most e-cards have been copied for hundreds of thousands times, which has lost its true value already.

People might be tired of checking the e-cards in their emails, but nobody could find the excuse to refuse to open the real paper cards with joys and blessings that have been already delivered to the mail boxes.

Besides e-cards and paper cards, interviewee B and interviewee D also mentioned that phone calls can function as well as greeting cards. Interviewee D said that sometimes shopping cards with values in it (namely "lahjakortti" in Finnish market) and also gifts could work better than greeting cards. At least, they are more practical.

In a short summary, almost each case company adopted both paper cards and electronic cards as the way to send greetings. From a micro perspective, paper cards can show a kind of emotional concerns and are found really practical in individual cases. However, from macro perspective, electronic cards are more widely accepted by the current society because they possess abundant advantages such as convenience, cost-saving, instant delivery, and sound effects.

4.1.3 Holiday is greeting cards' busy day

Greeting cards can be sent at Christmas, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, birthday, etc. One of the statistics show that of the total greeting cards sales in Canadian market, 45% are seasonal. And of that 60% are Christmas cards (Tutunjian, 2002, p. 41). Finnish and Chinese markets are the two special case markets in this research, and the greeting cards' market can be different from that Canadian market. In this section, it is analyzed what the busiest days of greeting cards are for Finnish and Chinese market separately.

Totally eight interviews have been conducted, including both pilot interviews and theme interviews, from which it has been found that Christmas is the most popular holiday to send greeting cards for the business purpose. All the eight interviewees agree that Christmas cards contain not only Christmas greetings but also New Year greetings. Importantly and surprisingly, no Chinese office sends greeting cards specially during Spring Festival, namely Chinese New Year.

Laura Xiao from Maersk Line said:

Our company is a multinational company. We have both Chinese and foreign customers, and our employers are foreigners, so we take Christmas as our main greeting season, not on Chinese New Year... We only send greeting cards once a year.

China is a highly westernized market especially in big cities like Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Beijing, which stick to the western holidays very much. Due to the frequent communication with their clients and headquarters abroad, most international companies all use English as their corporate language. Even if sending emails with colleagues of the same nationality, people still write in English.

Laura Xiao added:

It is required to write emails in English in Maersk Line. Another reason is that it is easier and more transparent to find out who is at fault in the mistake.

Due to the globalization and the fast economic development, for Chinese the most popular greeting seasons have gradually turned to Christmas.

In Finnish market, it is no doubt that Christmas is the biggest holiday. Christmas plays a very important role in Finnish culture. What children expect most is Christmas gifts.

"I still remember when I was a kid, I always began to countdown in the late autumn, and talked about Santa the whole year. Though we also celebrate Vappu (May 1st), Easter, Mid-Summer day, nothing could compare the importance with Christmas" in interviewee B's words. Both interviewee B and interviewee C agree that they send greeting cards only for Christmas holiday.

In short, nowadays the Christmas holiday is the busiest greeting season for both the Chinese and the Finnish markets, and the business people especially from international companies send greeting cards only for this holiday on most occasions.

4.2 Sub-question 2: Preferred color of greeting cards

This section helps find out the possibly preferred color of Finns and Chinese. There exists huge cultural difference between these two nations, which also influences on the aesthetic view of color and image. The Literature Review states earlier about the color meaning of Finnish and Chinese culture respectively. This section analyzes the Finnish and Chinese color preferences based on the selection result of color by all the interviewees.

First of all, let us see the search results of Google with the key word "Christmas card" in Finnish and in Chinese respectively, joulukortti and 圣诞贺卡. Only the first page is presented here for analysis. It is quite apparent to see the sharp comparison between the two search results.

The picture below is the result of inputting "joulukortti" by Google image (see Figure 9). Generally speaking, the color types appearing in the eyes are quite simple. Blue and plain colors dominate, which makes the readers feel the coming of winter. Blue and white from the screenshot precisely match the core value of Finnish national flag that blue symbolizes the sky and white stands for snow.
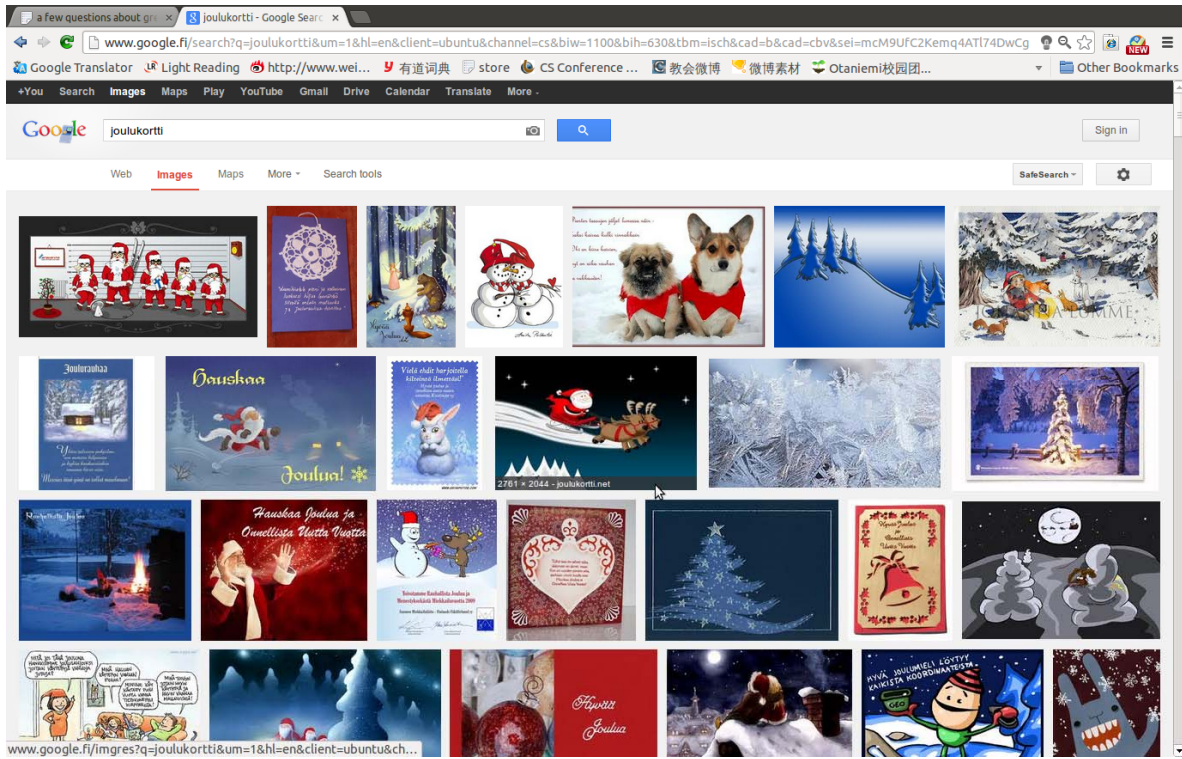
Figure 9. Screenshot of google search for "joulukortti" (accessed on 11.3.2013)

The other picture below is the result of inputting "圣诞贺卡" by google image (see Figure 10). The style is completely different from the previous one. The major color is red and shows happiness very much. Chinese search result cannot show any coldness at all as red belongs to warm color (Chandrashekaran, Suri, and Grewal 2009, p. 373). Literature Review regards earlier how important red to Chinese is like how blue to Finns.
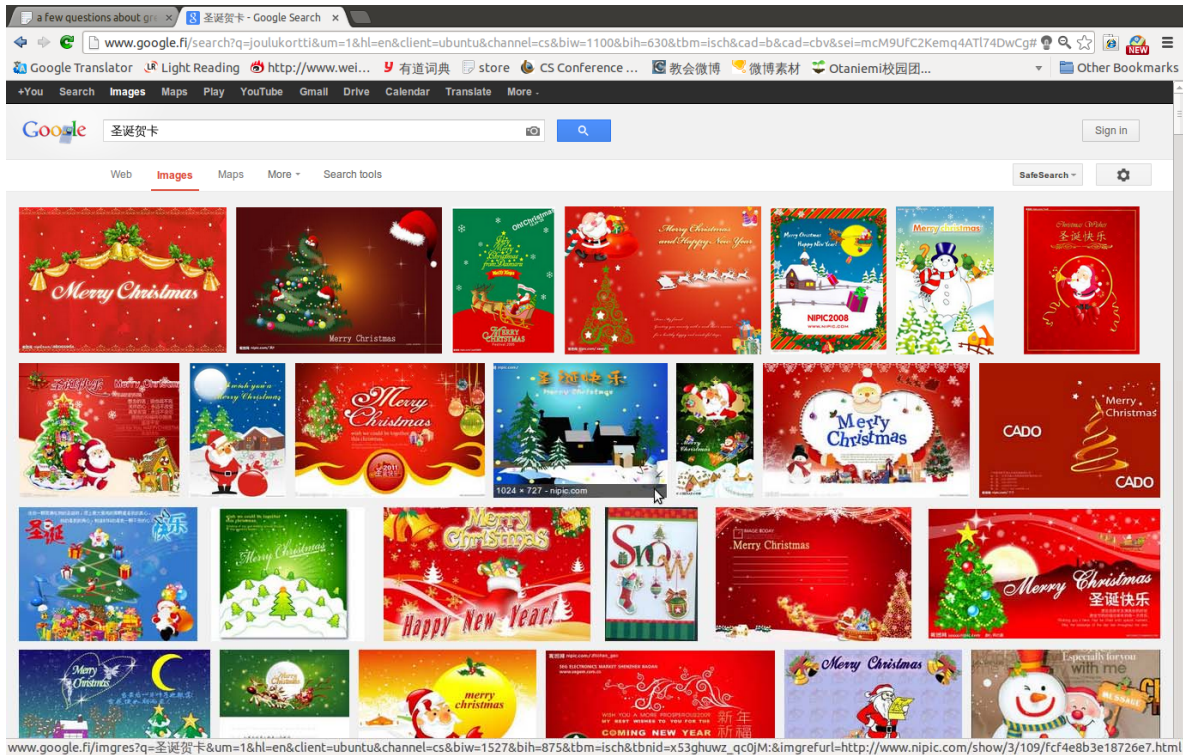
Figure 10. Screenshot of google search for "圣诞贺卡" (accessed on 11.3.2013)

From this google search practice, it is very obvious to see the color preference of Finns and Chinese. In the following parts, interviewees' viewpoints on color are theme on the basis of both pilot interviews and theme interviews.

Liuzi Yang from UPM said:

For a business greeting card, we don't like to choose a colorful one because simple color reveals more professionalization.

The Finnish interviewee B held the same opinion as Yang, emphasizing that the greeting card with fewer colors is acceptable. Otherwise, the recipients would feel a kind of personal greeting rather than inter-company greeting. According to interviewee B, he strongly feels blue can carry the feeling of trustworthiness which his company tends to spread, so he

55

always prefers to choose the blue one as the main color. He is not sure why he likes blue better than warm colors like red, orange, etc. Probably it is because Finland geographically belongs to the northern part of the Europe and Finns are more getting used to the cold color as the environment is quiet, the snow is white, and the sky is blue.

Hao Sun from Nielsen said:

I would like to choose the cards that look clear and decent, not complicated, but no limits to the color type. The greeting card can be red even if the color of our logo is blue...

Interviewee D from Glaston is an experienced manager in multinational companies. He said from his own experience:

There is no strict requirement on the color when we choose to send greeting cards, but the chosen one cannot be too casual and needs to show happiness since it's for the holiday greeting.

In 2012, Glaston's greeting card is orange, which does not follow the logo color, blue. In practice, Glaston changes the design of greeting card each year. According to interviewee D, receivers can be bored with the same color and design if they get the same card over and over. Sometimes the changes of color show great innovation.

To sum up, due to the geographical position and cultural issues, Finns tend to choose cold color as the background color of greeting card like blue, while Chinese prefer to choose the warm color such as red and orange. Finn's choosing blue is to show formality and trustworthiness, and Chinese's choosing red is to show happiness and friendliness. Last but not least, it is not necessary that the color of greeting card matches the color of logo. The value of greeting card is independent of logo. The purpose of greeting card is to say "hello" to the clients and to carry the company's regards, rather than to promote the company's name.

4.3 Sub-question 3: Preferred images of greeting cards

4.3.1 Image pool for selection

In this study, totally 10 images have been selected for the analysis. Let's assume that we are going to send Christmas cards, so all the images chosen are for Christmas greetings. Each image has its potential meaning and value for research. The purpose of this section is to tell the reason why this or that picture is prepared as sample for selection.

Picture A:

Figure 11. Analysis of sample picture A

The texts and the images show clearly that the card is for Christmas greeting. The basic point of the picture is that Santa Claus is bringing a large amount of gifts, and the reindeer is waiting for him outside. The bigger size of Santa with Christmas tree outweighs the reindeer with the house in order to highlight the theme of the card. The red background color brings sort of warmth and kindness. From the Literature Review we have already gotten to know the color preference of Finns and Chinese. Moreover, the texts on the image

are mostly in Chinese. Therefore, the hypothesis is that the target of this picture is Chinese, but it is still possible that Finnish interviewees would choose this picture.

Picture B:

Figure 12. Analysis of sample picture B

The background color of picture B is blue. The headline tells us, "Merry Christmas". Due to its simplicity and clarity, the image conveys its basic message very apparently and efficiently. The shining Christmas tree catches our eye at the first sight. This image does not have much text, but still expresses its meaning clearly. It seems to have no story on the surface, but each reader can imagine different stories behind it. Because of its simplicity and the blue color, the most possible target group of this image is Finnish interviewee.

However, Chinese interviewees are also able to read English headline "Merry Christmas", so there exists a small proportion of Chinese who would choose the image.

Picture C:

Figure 13. Analysis of sample picture C

Picture C takes us to the fairy tales. There is no text on the image at all, but the image itself clearly reflects its purpose. Every one who sees the picture can figure out which holiday it is through three key elements: Santa, reindeer, and snow. The basic point of the picture is that at Christmas Eve the Santa Claus pulled by the reindeer is going to distribute Christmas gifts to children. The night is clear. Santa is always coming all the way from far away places. The main purpose of choosing Picture C as the sample image is to compare with Picture B with some texts on it in order to see whether the interviewees prefer texts or not. From the Literature Review we have already drawn the conclusion on the color

preference of Finns and Chinese. Therefore, the target of this picture is Finn, which is under hypothesis.

Picture D:

Figure 14. Analysis of sample picture D

The background color of picture D is bright red. The essential point of the image has been conveyed sufficiently by the drawing. The Santa Claus and the Christmas tree show its purpose very well. The Santa's smiling face carries a sense of happiness to the readers. Compared with the designs on the card, the red color first catches people's eyes. In this picture, the pattern design outweighs the texts very much. There are a few lines of very small-sized text on the lower side of the image, but few people would read what exactly they are. The reason to select this picture as sample is to compare with sample picture A with a lot of texts and with sample picture B with different background color. The target is Chinese.

Picture E:

Figure 15. Analysis of sample picture E

A few simple lines constitute the picture E with sincere seasonal greetings. The snowman is the whole story, but it tells clearly the season, the time, and the weather. Silence and harmoniousness are other features of the image. Blue has been taken as the main color of this picture. Compared with other sample images, picture E does not look three-dimensional, and uses limited number of colors: blue, white, black, and red. The former three colors are very popular among Finns, so it is not a surprise at all that the Finnish interviewees would choose this picture.

Picture F:

Figure 16. Analysis of sample picture F

This picture is the greeting card sample from Department of Energy Technology, Aalto University. The card shows clearly its source and purpose. The story on the card is that one winter morning the sun is rising above the ground covered with snow. Sunshine is the hope of the winter just as education is the hope of the nation. The image also shows that Aalto University is a very prestigious school like the new-rised sun, youthful but prosperous. The "leading character" of the image is the sun, while other objects are to accentuate its importance and role. The greeting card itself has plenty of potential meanings. Why this card is selected is to see whether the interviewees would think to present the company's history and corporate culture before sending greeting cards. There are no limits on the target interviewees. Since both Finnish and English languages are already on the image, Finns and Chinese both have possibility to choose this picture.

Picture G:

Figure 17. Analysis of sample picture G

The color of cyan is considered mixed color of blue and green, partly blue and partly green. The image is quite simple: nothing but trees are standing in the snow. The texts on the image show that it is a Christmas greeting. Why this image is choosen as sample is for the color purpose, whether cyan, not exactly blue, is also welcomed by Finns.

For Chinese, the importance of red cannot be replaced by other colors. During Chinese traditional holidays, everything is possibly colored by red. The following picture (see Figure 17) is the example of holiday card. In fact, only the texts on the image show the Christmas greetings. Otherwise, it can be used for any holidays. The aim of picture H is to discover whether Chinese also like to select simple images as business greeting. Theoretically speaking, the card with simple design and red background should be the preferred option for Chinese business man, but let us see whether it works in practice.

Picture H:

Figure 18. Analysis of sample picture H

Picture I:

Figure 19. Analysis of sample picture I

In picture I, there is a sharp color contrast between red and blue. This picture is selected on purpose as a sample because sometimes it is the contrast of color difference that can catch the readers' eyes. The Santa Claus carrying a bag of gifts is the main point of the image. He is coming far away from forests, and seems to get lost now. There is no text on the card, but everyone gets the point that we are celebrating the Christmas. Color has a big power. Readers tend to be caught by the background color first and then comes the image. Therefore, those who choose picture B or picture C can hesitate at the moment on seeing picture I because the themes and the elements in these three images are quite similar. The purpose of this picture is to compare with B and C.

Picture J:

Figure 20. Analysis of sample picture J

Picture J is the last sample picture. It looks a little bit messy, but shows the theme point very well. Its background color is blue, but mixed with other cheerful objects like colorful

gifts, jingle bells, Santa Claus, reindeer, an old house, and lots of stars in the sky. Additionally, the three reindeer and the carriage with Santa are running on the rainbow, which looks like happy musical scores. It is true that Finns prefer blue color, but it remains a question whether blue theme color with colorful objects is still their choice. The aim of the picture J lies in it.

4.3.2 Results of the selection

During the interview, every interviewee is asked to choose three images or less out of these ten samples as the greeting card that needs to be sent to their clients and partner companies. Each group has to get three images at most (the number could be less than three). After deciding the images, the interviewees are told the potential meaning of each image, and also asked why he/she would choose the certain image.

Out of eight interviews (including both pilot interviews and theme interviews), only six interviewees have clearly stated their choice on the sample images. Additionally, the order in the cell reflects the interviewees' preferences. The results are in the following table (See Table 8).

Table 8. Selection result of sample picture

Interviewee	Selection results	Nationality
Liuzi Yang	B, F	Chinese
Queenie Qi	D, C, F	Chinese
Interviewee A	F, D, C	Chinese
Interviewee B	B, F, G	Finnish
Interviewee C	B, C, G	Finnish
Interviewee D	D, C, B	Chinese

For the Chinese group, picture C has been chosed three times, picture D three times, picture F three times, and picture B twice. Moreover, picture D ranks first twice.

The Chinese Interviewee D states why he chooses the picture D:

Conciseness, of course, is a very important element in the business greeting card, but showing sorts of happiness in the card can greatly reflects that I want to keep deeper personal relationship with you besides business relationship.

In China, people of business partnership can develop into very good friends. After this friendship has been established, the further cooperation becomes easier and easier. That is why Interviewee D always emphasizes the importance of personal relationship. Business cooperation is short, but the personal relationship can last as long as for good. Interviewee D works on the management level of Glaston, so once he says that he wants to keep personal relationship, it shows the equality with the shop floor workers for example, and people feel he is an approachable leader.

Additionally, it is not a surprise at all that Chinese people choose red as the background color. Another reason why picture D ranks first is due to the color reason.

Queenie Qi said:

Picture C looks futuristic. Since it is for Christmas greetings, Christmas elements must be there such as Santa Claus, snow, gifts, etc.

When she was asked whether the background color counts, she answered that blue is a professional and formal color, but Christmas is a happy holiday. Formality does not seem so important compared with the Christmas atmosphere. As a business greeting card, Christmas elements can be added in the card because ABB Shanghai office must tell others that we also follow the western tradition to celebrate Christmas as a highly international company.

For the Finnish group, picture B has been chosen twice, picture G twice, picture F once, and picture C once. Moreover, picture B ranks first among other chosen pictures.

Interviewee B also stated why he likes picture B best. The principle to decide which card can be used as the business greeting cards is to see whether the image is stylish, simple, has few colors. He will not choose the image with too much color as it looks too casual. Picture B fits the criteria very well. Also, design is very important. Few patterns would be better. It is the same reason as fewer colors. Otherwise, the overall visual effects can be messy, which is absolutely avoided as business greeting cards.

Additionally, interviewee C says from his own experience that blue-related color outnumbers other color systems, so he tends to choose the blue one as habbit. Texts on the card are also important, but not that much. Sometimes too much texts can destroy the overall effects. Plain colors are acceptable. It is the same reason why he chooses the picture G, very concise, very plain.

4.4 The main research question:

Role of business greeting cards in Finnish and Chinese companies

This section is the core finding part, which contains interview results and combines with the summaries from previous finding sections. First of all, it is highly necessary to discuss whether greeting cards have positive impacts on business communication and relation, on which card-sending strategies are greatly based. Additionally, it is discovered from the interviews that most company's greeting cards always go with small gifts. That is why to discuss the necessity of company gifts becomes so indispensible.

4.4.1 Greeting cards have positive impacts on business communication

Greeting cards can convey a lot of messages not only about greetings, but also the way to treat the clients, so the senders' experience in sending cards is very important, especially

when texts are required, an appropiate way to express greetings is particularly important. Fortunately, all the interviewees invited have abundant work experience in business-related fields, sending greeting cards is a normal practice during holidays for them. This section describes the interviewees' attitudes towards the greeting cards.

During the interviews, six out of eight interviewees agree that sending greeting cards can have a positive impacts on business communication and relations. Liuzi Yang from UPM, who does not agree the point, explained that compared with a greeting card, a shopping card (similar to "lahja kortti" in Finnish market) and gifts that are very popular in Asian markets play better roles in promoting business communication. Liuzi added that if she sends cards to customers regularly, once she stops, they will care very much. However, UPM sends greeting cards as a normal practice every New Year (1st day of each year), which is required by the managements. The other one who disagrees the greeting cards' positive impacts is Laura Xiao from Maersk Line. As she works for the management, she strongly feels that customer relations have a lot to do with the service quality, which cannot be decided by a small piece of greeting card, but sending is always better than nothing. Interestingly, Maersk Line sends greeting cards as normal practice every Christmas, which is required by the managements.

On the other hand, the rest of the six interviewees agree on the positive impacts on business communication and relation by sending greeting cards at the right time. According to the Chinese Interviewee D, "*Greeting card plays a role like affectional tie in business. Even though we don't have business contact, we are still friends. At least, we are still thinking of you.*"

The Chinese Interviewee D strongly advocates that greeting card is a good way to keep in touch with customers. Business people are alway busy at work. They do not have many opportunities to get together or even say "hello" with each other. Holiday is a good chance to establish such business relationship once again. Otherwise, the business relation or even the personal relation might be truly ceased.

Interviewee D also added:

"It is true that sending greeting cards does not necessarily help tremendously from the business perspective, but to keep contact, not to stop the connections."

Connections are very important in China. It is supposed to say that connections are more important than business itself because business can be easily conducted with many connections in the Chinese society. It is rare in Chinese market that people working in the management level only have a few connections. Business needs connections. That is the reason.

The Finnish Interviewee B said:

"Customer relation can be the by-product of holiday greetings."

Generally speaking, sending greeting cards are mostly for the business purpose. Meanwhile, a lot of other things are also fulfilled. Customer relation is a good example to the point. If a company receives a large number of greeting cards from its clients, then the receiver tends to see who else does not send. In this sense, not sending is very likely to exert negative effects on business relation.

Similarly, the Finnish Interviewee C pointed out that a simple message could be a good chance to spur furher communication. Focus should be on the importance to make the customers know that their business is also personally important to you. Additionally, Interviewee C mentioned that it is always supposed to bear in mind to express your sincerity in the card rather than advertising. A lot of people think that sending greeting cards is a good opportunity to promote the service and advertise, which is completely wrong from his point of view. The recipients are possibly bored and even feel annoyed with your so-called "greetings" later on. To even make matters worse, you might lose a good customer.

4.4.2 Card-sending strategies: with gifts or without?

Card-sending habits may vary with the difference of culture, gender, job position, and so on. The customers that we do not contact very often are the very group that needs to contact again. The same situation in business field. During the interview, some of the interviewees emphasize the importance of greeting cards with gifts. According to Laura Xiao, *"gifts are more impressive than greeting card itself"*.

Let us take UPM Shanghai office for example. Liuzi Yang, Marketing Executive from UPM, talked about her company´s strategy for greeting cards. She devides the UPM customers into four categories: important customer, regular customer, new customer, and little contact customers. For important customer, UPM always sends out greeting cards on the New Year Day (1st of January) together with a gift. For the new customers, UPM also sends out greeting cards for the New Year with a gift. However, for the regular customers, they usually get a piece of small gift together with the greeting cards. As for the little contact customers, greeting cards only are sent by UPM office without gifts.

Actually, UPM´s practice above is not the only single case among my case companies. Some other companies also adopt "card plus gift" strategy.

According to the Chinese Interviewee D:

"When sending gifts with greeting cards, we usually devide customers into two type. One is our old customers who have a better relationship with us and often buy our service and products. They will get the better gifts. The others will get less good gifts, but both gifts are nice."

The Glaston Company also sends greeting cards with gifts which depend on how often the customers use their services. The gifts includes note book, USB memory stick, calendar, and so on. From Interviewee D´s experience, gifts are kept much longer than greeting cards. The Glaston logo is also printed on these gifts to function as advertising effects.

Queenie Qi from ABB said:

"We usually exchange gifts more often than greeting cards. I should say, greeting cards always go with gifts."

Queenie thinks sending greeting cards only is gradually obsolete, and actually the idea has been weakened. Greeting cards from ABB are used only for Christmas and New Year holidays, but small gifts and souvenirs can be used throughout the whole year. Let´s assume the holidays other than Christmas and New Year. There are not many options for greeting cards to choose from, but the small gifts in the company are always abundant and available. It is much more natural for the Marketing persons to stick to the gifts rather than greeting cards only. During Christmas and New Year holidays, ABB usually leaves the message on the greeting cards and sends small gifts to the non-face-to-face customers. When customers visit ABB company in person or vice versa, the company tends to exchange gifts only.

The Finnish interviewee B is from a medium-sized Finnish company. The contact with Chinese office is not very often. According to interviewee B, it costs a lot to send gifts from Helsinki to Beijing, but sending greeting cards by surface mail can save a lot. However, when someone visits the Helsinki office, greeting cards are always sent with a small gift. Importantly, greeting cards without greeting texts are not allowed to send. In other words, blank cards are not adopted to send as greetings.

To summarize, in the business field, greeting cards are rarely sent alone, but usually with a small gift in order to impress the recipients. Greeting card itself must have some texts in it. Greeting card is an effective way to enhance the business communication and relation, so it is highly important for each company to tailor to its own card-sending strategies. Each company has its own corporate culture and normal practice. It is difficult to use one single strategy in all sorts of business.

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings of the research, and the links to the Literature Reviews. The research finding indicates that the cultural factor is one of the biggest reasons for Finns and Chinese to decide on a certain image. The general color preference of these two nations also stems from the cultural issue. At the beginning of the chapter, the important etiquettes are summarized and explained from the interviewees' points of view. The main findings are presented accordingly because they work as the foundations for the analysis of link to the Literature Review.

5.1 Main findings

This section demonstrates the main findings of this research in the order of the three research sub-questions. The main research question is answered in the end, which is greatly based on the summaries from the first three research sub-questions. Discussion should always be from the specific to the general, so it is highly necessary to present the main findings once again before linking them to the literature and theory.

1. "Is culture factor affecting the selection of greeting cards?"

YES! Cultural difference plays a role that differentiate Finnish and Chinese aesthetic standards. From business perspective, two main biggest differences exist in the way that might hinder business communication and relation between these two cultures. One is directness/indirectness. The other one is hierarchy/heterarchy. Directness/indirectness is the way that people face to answer a question. Chinese tend to belong to indirectness, while Finns are more directness. Additionally, according to the Oxford Dictionary, "hierarchy" is defined as "*a system in which members of an organization or society are ranked according*

to relative status or authority". By comparison, the definition of "heterarchy" from Wikipedia is *"a system of organization replete with overlap, multiplicity, mixed ascendancy, and/or divergent-but-coexistent patterns of relation, in which each element shares the same 'horizontal' position of power and authority"* (Wikipedia, accessed on 1.3.2013). From the earlier review of literature as well as the interview results, Chinese are more hierarchy-oriented and Finns are more heterarchy-oriented. In fact, Finnish and Chinese preferences on the color and the images reflect the cultural difference more intensely.

2. What is the preferred color of greeting cards in business contexts?

Due to the geographical position and cultural issues, Finns tend to choose cold color as the background color of greeting card like blue, while Chinese prefer to choose the warm color such as red and orange. Finn's choosing blue is to show formality and trustworthiness, and Chinese's choosing red is to show happiness and friendliness. There exists huge cultural difference between Finland and China, which also influences on the aesthetic view of color and image.

Interestingly, when typing the key word "Christmas card" in Finnish and in Chinese respectively ("joulukortti" and "圣诞贺卡") in the Google image, we can get the totally different results (see Figure 9 and Figure 10). The result of "joulukortti" shows more simplicity than that of "圣诞贺卡". Blue and plain colors dominate, which makes the readers feel the coming of winter. On the other hand, the result of "圣诞贺卡" by google image shows more enthusiasm. The major background color is red and shows happiness very much. From the practice of Google image search, it is very obvious to see the color preference of Finns and Chinese.

3. What is the preferred image of greeting cards in business contexts?

Chinese and Finnish viewpoints on the preferred image are quite different. For the Chinese group, conciseness is a very important element when deciding a greeting card because business greetings always require conciseness. Due to the cultural reasons, showing happiness in the greeting card is very necessary. Red color can help reveal happiness. Furthermore, if the card is for Christmas greetings, Christmas elements must be on the card, such as Santa Claus, snow, Christmas tree, gifts, etc. even if the card is for business purpose.

As for the Finnish group, people expect the greeting card with less color types because too much color makes it too casual. Design of the overall visual effects is very important, never too messy to catch the main point. Additionally, the image with blue color is more welcome for Finns. Too much texts on the card may also destroy the overall effects.

4. What is the role of greeting cards in business communication and relation between Finnish and Chinese companies?

Greeting cards have positive impacts on business communication. Sometimes, the customer relation can be the by-product of holiday greetings. Sending greeting card is a good way to keep in touch with the customers. Greeting card plays a role like affectional tie in business contexts. Even though people do not have business contact, they can still be very good friends.

Another related question is concerning the card-sending strategy. Is it wise to send with gifts or without? In the business field, the greeting cards are rarely sent alone, but usually with a small gift in order to impress the recipients. The greeting card itself must have texts in it. Sending greeting card is an effective way to enhance the business communication and relation, so it is highly important for each company to tailor to its own card-sending strategies.

5.2 Links of findings to the literature

This chapter discusses the links of some finding parts to the theoretical framework of the study and the present literature. Cultural issues mostly involve the directness/indirectness and the hierarchy/heterarchy results of Finns and Chinese, which is substantially supported by the earlier reviewed literature. The other aspect is about color. Here, only red and blue are picked for the comparison with the theoretical and the practical meanings.

5.2.1 Cultural issue

Previous studies show that Finland and China have huge cultural difference, especially in the Hofstede's (2001) classic study of dimensions of cultural values. The dimension of Power Distance supports well the hierarchy/heterarchy results of Finns and Chinese. The Power Distance can be defined as "*the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally*" (Hofstede 1991, p. 28). The Power Distance dimension score of Finland is 33, while that of China is 80. In reality, the findings of hierarchy/heterarchy status of Finnish and Chinese companies match the theory very well.

Literature Review states that China belongs to high-context culture, where people express their meanings and emotions implicitly and indirectly. According to Coates (2009, p. 40), Chinese communication is less direct than Western culture, and Chinese rarely say no to a suggestion or a question, but say that further discussion is needed. During interviews with Chinese interviewees, it is also said that Chinese prefer to accept a milder way to say "no" to the superiors and the seniors by small talk rather than point out the counterviews against them directly in public.

5.2.2 Color aspect

The previous studies suggest that some colors share the similar meanings between Finnish and Chinese cultures, but some do not. Here, only red and blue are picked on purpose for study. According to Aslam (2006, p. 19), the color of red symbolizes love, happiness, and lucky for Chinese. Loiri and Juholin's (2011, p. 25) theory shows that blue stands for ice, sky, snowdrift, and water for Finns.

Table 9. Theoretical and practical comparison of color perception

	Red for Chinese	Blue for Finns
In theory	love, happiness, lucky	ice, sky, snowdrift, water
In practice	happiness, friendliness	formality, trustworthiness

Table 9 shows the theoretical and practical comparison of red and blue for the Chinese and the Finns respectively. Overall speaking, the theoretical meaning of the red color for Chinese is quite similar to practical meaning. However, the meanig of blue for Finns is sorts of material objects in theory such as ice, sky, etc., while in practice it is more like abstract concept like trustworthiness.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the overall conclusion of the study. The order is quite clear. Firstly, the research summary is demonstrated to get a whole picture of the study. Secondly, limitation of the study is clearly stated followed by the practical implications. Finally, the suggestions for further research are discussed.

6.1 Research summary

The purpose of this study is to figure out whether greeting cards have a positive impact on business communication and relation, especially within the Finnish-Chinese companies. There are some earlier studies about the greeting cards' impacts on personal life, but few indicates from business perspectives. Moreover, sending gifts during holidays to the business partners is more common than greeting cards, in which another research gap lies. Focusing on the greeting cards rather than gifts is the theme of the study.

The research question *"What is the role of greeting cards in business communication and relation between Finland and China?"* is divided into three sub-questions. The aim of the first research sub-question *"Is culture factor affecting the selection of greeting cards?"* is to explore how cultural factors influence people' preference on the greeting cards, which links closely with the other two sub-questions. The aim of the second research sub-question *"What is the preferred color of greeting cards in business contexts?"* is to explore the Finnish and Chinese preferred color due to the cultural issues. Finally, the aim of the third research sub-question *"What is the preferred image of greeting cards in business contexts?"* is to illustrate that cultural factors influence not only people's preference on color but also image. When selecting a certain image, people tend to think of more aspects other than color.

The literature review of the study plays a foundation for the further research. Cambridge Dictionary defines greeting card as *"a piece of thick paper folded in half with a picture on the outside and a message inside, which you write in and send or give to someone, for example at Christmas or on their birthday"*. That is to say, greeting card is sent for holiday purpose. The literature review is built from three theoretical focus parts: firstly, cultural difference may hinder the communication; secondly, greeting card plays an important role in holiday greetings, which promotes the business communication and relation; thirdly, Finnish and Chinese color perception as well as the function of image is illustrated.

The empirical part of this study consists of four theme interviews with Marketing-related experts from international companies with offices both in Finland and China, and four pilot interviews with Chinese communication consultants. To begin with the research, the purpose of the pilot study is to explore whether greeting card has something to do with business communication, in other words, to find out whether it is worthwhile to launch this research. The pilot interviews provide the background information about the study and help outline the research. Addtionally, the theme interviews are conducted with four Marketing experts, two Finns and two Chinese. The theme interviews are conducted with in-depth questions in order to figure out cultural impacts on people's preference on color and image choice.

6.2 Limitation of the study

As many of other studies, the current research has its shortcomings. There are three major limitations in this study. First, the sample of the research is quite limited. It only covers four pilot interviews and four theme interviews. Since the data is non-numerical, it is difficult to establish model or calculate probability, which might bring about less accurate results. Also, the results from interviews are mostly based on the interviewees' own experiences, which might not be applicable to all the international companies.

The second limitation deals also with the accuracy of the conclusion drawn from the interviews. It may happen that the conclusion is not "objective" enough because the author is from purely Chinese background, and sometimes has difficulty in understanding Finnish culture. Therefore, it is likely to be subjective to interpret the findings.

The third limitation lies in the fact that the auther lacks technical ability to design the image. For instance, it cannot be fulfilled to switch the background color on the same picture. Rather, the author tries to find other images with similar characters as the original one. Therefore, it would be better to do the research if one picture could be kept but changing minor elements only like texts, color, etc.

6.3 Practical implications

The finding of the thesis indicates that sending greeting card is an effective way to enhance the business communication and relation, which is also widely adopted by most international companies. In this sense, negative impacts must exist on the business relation if companies fail to send greeting cards on holidays, especially the recipients receive greetings from other companies.

The companies should also carefully consider the coloring of the greeting cards. As has been already stated earlier, blue is the most widely accepted color among Finns. Blue can provide the sense of trustworthiness and good quality of service. Therefore, it can be demonstrated that using the blue color on the greeting cards can reinforce the customer relations with Finnish customers, which leads to the popularity of the company products and services. Similarly, red color should be the No. 1 choice for the Chinese recipients.

Another important aspect is about the image on the greeting card. Companies usually do not have many options of greeting card. Images are almost the same for the whole year in practice, the same image for both Finnish recipients and Chinese recipients. Due to the

huge cultural difference between these two nations, it would be better for international companies to design many different images for a holiday, in order to meet the tastes of both Finns and Chinese.

Last but not least, the eight etiquettes and advice of greeting cards have been summarized from all the interviews. The interviewees provided valuable etiquettes about the greeting cards from their own experiences. Some are very apparent, but some are really imperceptible. All these etiquettes are practical in both Finnish and Chinese companies.

Ensure a good quality card

To begin with holiday greetings, a good quality card is very important, which shows how valuable the receivers are to you. Poor quality cards may be regarded as worthless investing more to the customers. The Finnish interviewee C pointed out that damaged cards can never be sent. To some extent, it is a kind of impolite to the recipients. Sometimes the recipients will take it as a sign for your business status. The poor quality cards may easily be thought that your business does not run well.

Additionally, once you receive a greeting card, it is still important to send back the thank-you note with a good quality card.

Always use titles

No matter whether your receivers are Chinese or Finnish, do remember to use titles especially for the business greetings. Business greeting cards to the clients are alway more formal than personal greeting cards to the friends. It is highly recommended to address like "Mr. And Mrs. Nieminen" rather than "Juha and Liisa Nieminen". Business greeting is on behalf of the whole company, which involves the corporate image and future development behind it. Therefore, contacting the customers with suitable titles is crucial.

Additionally, do not forget to write titles also on the envelope. Envelope is like the face of the greeting card. It is the envelope that leaves the first impression on the recipients. Never neglect the importance of the "face".

Personalized holiday message is recommended

Indeed, a lot of interviewees admit to go with the same message on the greeting cards due to the time reason. For example, it is impossible for the VP to write down different messages for each of the recipients. However, if the condition permits, it is strongly recommended to write different personalized holiday message to the recipients, at least some important customers. People usually get impressed by the personalized greetings. The Finnish interviewee C pointed out that he had kept well all the greeting cards with easily-recognized personalized message, but the cards with quite official uniform messages are piled together and put in another place.

Sign each card personally

Computer-generated symbols makes it impersonal and are easily considered as mass-produced message for all the receivers. Indeed, it saves a lot of time, but as a return, you may lose more customers. According to Laura Xiao, each time she helps her boss send greeting cards, she usually prepares for the text beforehand and ask for signature later on. Signature is always done by the boss, which greatly shows respects to the recipients. For the important customers, Laura´s boss adds the handwriting message himself with personal signature.

Make sure the card will arrive on time

People become less expected to receive the greeting cards when the holiday is over. Post office is normally closed during holidays. In Finland, express delivery is much more expensive than ordinary postage, so try to make sure the postage is paid enough in order to prevent from late arrival. Interviewee B said that he usually sends out the domestic cards around one week before the Christmas Eve, but the international cards could be four weeks earlier.

Do not mention the company service

As stated earlier already, Interviewee C emphasized that describing the company services in bulk on the greeting cards is thoroughly forbidden, but the company logo is allowed. Loyal customers must be very familiar with the company logo, so there is no need to tell the service and products any more. Otherwise, the recipients are possibly bored with your greetings later on. To even make matters worse, you might lose a good customer. The purpose of sending greeting cards is to reinforce the business relationship rather than ruin the relationship.

Select a card that reflects your corporate culture

From the interviews, it is already summarized that the color of the greeting card does not necessarily match the company logo. However, selecting a card reflecting corporate culture is very important. For example, the pictures for UPM can be the trees and plants, etc. Liuzi Yang from UPM said, "*It is not suitable to put some over-abstract images on our greeting cards to prevent from messing up.*" Importantly, the overall design of the image should reflect the corporate culture. Once the customers receive the greeting cards, they can easily recognize which company they are from on glancing at the images.

<u>To send greetings not only for Christmas purpose is recommended</u>

Most companies only send greeting cards for Christmas. A few of them do for other holidays like customers' birthday or even their family members' birthday. From the interviews, it is interesting that all the interviewees agree that sending greeting cards should be not only for Christmas but also for other days, but only a few of them really send greeting cards also on other occasions. Interviewee A pointed out that at one time he sent a birthday card to one of his clients. After that, indeed the business relationship with the two companies has been enhanced a lot. Their coorperation still lasts up till now. It seems a good thing, but the fact is that Interviewee A invisibly shoulder more work load. He has to keep in mind the customer's birthday every year because he is afraid that once he sends birthday card every year, what will happen if he forget at a year? Does it influence the customer relation? In a word, to send greeting cards for other special holiday is like a double-edged sword that can play in a positive and negative way like Interviewee A's example. Additionally, sending paper cards for other holidays can be a big cost for the company, which is greatly restricted to the company budgets. For the long-run business relation, to send the greetings not only for Christmas is highly recommended, but not compulsory.

To summarize the practical implications, companies can always do better to increase the visual effects of greeting cards, by adjusting the color choice or the image selection. Additionally, it is highly important to keep in mind the eight tips about sending greeting cards, which has been already stated in the finding parts: ensure a good quality card, always use titles, recommend to use personalized message, sign each card personally, make sure the card will reach the receivers on time, do not mention the company service on the card, select a card that reflects the corporate culture, try to send the greeting cards other than for Christmas purpose. That is the key to maintain the good business relation with the clients.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

This section concentrates on how this study can be elaborated and continued later on, and how it involves other fields of studies regarding the similar topics.

As noticed during the research of types of greeting cards, online electronic card was led to heated discussion. Some interviewees mentioned that readers might be much more emotionally reading the cards when they hear the music from the e-cards. Unfortunately, the interviewees did not elaborate what exactly the music types are. It could be traditional Christmas songs like American jingle bells, or could be pop music. Since the author does not have sufficient background knowledge about music, further studies can focus on this field.

Moreover, gifts also play a very important role in this greeting card research. However, only a few lines were drop for gifts. The current study concentrates on the greeting card, so the analysis for the gifts is not enough. It is highly recommended that further studies also focus on this area because greeting cards rarely go without gifts in the business contexts. They have a close relation with each other.

To conclude, future research can be done also in the business field with concentration on the music types of the online greeting cards, and on the gift exchange. The current study can provide a ground for the further research.

REFERENCES

Asimov, I. (1987). *Beginnings: The story of origins- of mankind, life, the earth, the universe*. New York: Berkley Books.

Aslam, M.M. (2006). Are you selling the Right Colour? A Cross-cultural Review of Colour as a Marketing Cue. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 12(1), 15-30

Bond, M. (1986). *The psychology of the Chinese people*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cacioppo, John T.; Andersen, Barbara L. (1981) *Greeting Cards as Data on Social Processes*, Jun81, Vol. 2 Issue 2, p115-119. 5p.

CNTV news, 02.09.2011 http://english.cntv.cn/program/bizasia/20110209/104632.shtml (accessed on 24.9.2012)

Chaney, L. H. & Martin, J. S. (Eds.) (2007). *Intercultural business communication*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, Prentice Hall.

Cheal, D. J. (1986). The social dimensions of gift behavior. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 3, 423–440.

Coates R. (2009). *42 Rules for Sourcing and Manufacturing in China*. CA, USA: Super Star Press

Crozier, W. R. (1996) The psychology of colour preferences, *Review of Progress in Coloration and Related Topics*, 26, pp. 63-72.

Dindia, K. & Timmerman, L. Langan, E. Sahlstein, E. M. Quandt, J., (2004) The function of holiday greetings in maintaining relationships, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, Vol. 21 (5): 577-593.

Finland-China Trade Abstract (2011) Economic and commercial counsellor's office of the embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Finland, (accessed on 24.9.2012), http://fi.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/zxhz/hzjj/201105/20110507557636.html

Geboy, L. D. (1996). Color Makes a Better Message. *Journal of Health Care Marketing*, 16(2), p. 52-54.

Goldman, R; Papson, S. (2004).Nike Culture. The sign of the swoosh. Sage Publications, London.

Gore, K. (2007). *Networking cultural knowledge: an interactive and experiential strategy to apply intercultural communication in business.* WSOY Oppimateriaalit Oy

Hackman, M .Z., & Johnson, C .E .(1991). *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*. Prospect Heights, Ill :.Waveland press.

Hall, E.T. (Ed.) (1990). The Hidden Dimension. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group

Hirsjärvi, S. & Hurme H. (2000). Tutkimushaastattelu teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

Hirsjärvi, S., Remes, P. & Sajavaara, P. (2001). *Tutki ja kirjoita*. Vantaa: Tummavuorenkirjapaino Oy.

Hofstede, G. (1991) *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind.* England: McGraw-Hill Publishers

Hofstede, G. (2001) *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations*. 2nd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hupka, R. B., Zaleski, Z., Otto, J., Reidl, L. & Tarabrina, N. V. (1997) The colors of anger, envy, fear, and jealousy: a cross-cultural study, *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 28(2), pp. 156-171.

Jorfi, H. and Jorfi, M. (2012) Management: A study of organizational culture and the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication effectiveness, *Journal of Management Research*. 2012, Vol. 4, No. 1: E11.

Jeitosa Group International, < http://www.jeitosa.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/GDA-Global-Diversity-Awareness-Datasheet-v012012.pdf > accessed on 24.9.2012

Koivusalo, S. (2011), The importance of colors and images in visual communication on charity organizations' websites, Aalto University School of Economics.

Kommonen, K. (2011) Narratives on Chinese colour culture in business contextsThe Yin Yang Wu Xing of Chinese values, *Cross Cultural Management*. 2011, Vol. 18 Issue 3, p366-383

Lane, Randall (1991), "Does Orange Mean Cheap?" Forbes, (December 23), p. 144-147.

Langenbeck, K. (1913) Die akustische-chromatischen Synopsien, *Zeitschrift Für Sinnephysiologie*, 47, pp. 159-181

Loiri, P. & Juholin, E. (1998). Huom! Visuaalisen viestinnän käsikirja. Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy

Luftman, J. N. (2004). Managing the information technology resource: Leadership in the information age. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc.

Madden, T. J., Hewitt, K. & Roth, M. S. (2000) Managing images in different cultures: a cross-national study of color meanings and preferences, *Journal of International Marketing*, 8(4), pp. 90-107

Maybut, P. & Morehouse, R. (1994). Beginning Qualitative Research, *A philosophic and practical guide*. The Falmer Press.

Messaris, P. (1997). Visual Persuasion. *The Role of Images in Advertising*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Meyers, G. (1994). *Words in ads*. London: Edward Arnold.

Metcalf, L. E., Bird, A., Shankarmahesh, M., Aycan, Z., Larimo, J. & Valdelamar, D. D. (2006). Cultural tendencies in negotiation: A comparison of Finland, India, Mexico, Turkey, and the United States. *Journal of World Business*, 41(4), 382-394.

Moster, M. (2003) *United we Brand: How to Create a Cohensive Brand that's Seen, Heard and Remembered* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press).

Nan Tong Net, 11.01.2012 http://www.zgnt.net/content/2012-01/11/content_1985527.htm (accessed on 24.9.2012)

Ngai, P. B. (2000). Nonverbal communicative behavior in intercultural negotiations: Insights and applications based on findings from Ethiopia, Tanzania, Hong Kong, and the China mainland. *World Communication*, 29(4), p. 5-34.

Owen, C. L., Javalgi, R. G., & Scherer, R. F. (2007). Success strategies for expatriate women managers in China. *Review of Business*, 27(3), p. 24-31.

Oysterman, D., Coon, H. M., and Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). "Rethinking Individualism and Collectivism: Evaluation of Theoretical Assumptions and Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(1), 3-72.

Paul, S. & Okan, A. (2010). Color: Cross cultural marketing perspectives as to what governs our response to it. *ASBBS Annual Conference: Las Vegas; Proceedings of ASBBS,* 17(1), p. 950-954.

Penkova, A. (2012). Cultural synergies and challenges in the context of supplier relationship management: Finnish-Chinese interaction, Aalto University School of Economics.

Ronen, S. & Shenkar, O. (1985) Cluster countries on attitudinal dimensions: a review and synthesis, *Academy of Management Review*, 10(3), pp. 435-454.

Rubel, C. (1995) Marketing News, 9/25/95, Vol. 29 Issue 20, P14-14, 1/2p, 1 Color Photograph

Ruotsalainen, A. (2010) *From global to local markets: the role of communication consultancies in localizing the launch communication of MNCs*, Aalto University School of Economics.

Sanderson J. (2008). Essential Managers: Doing Business in China. London: Darling Kindersley Limited.

Souvenir, Gifts, & Novelties (2005), *Greeting card facts and figures*, May 2005, Vol. 44 Issue 4, p100-102, 2p

Souvenirs, Gifts, & Novelties. (2007), *The facts of greeting cards*, May2007, Vol. 46 Issue 4, p168-170. 2p.

Sigman, S. J. (1991). Handling the discontinuous aspects of continuing social relationships: Toward research on the persistence of social forms. *Communication Theory, 1*, 106-127.

Tan, A. (1991). The kitchen god's wife. New York: Ballantine.

The Finnish tourist board 2004. http://finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=160083&contentlan=2&culture=en-US

Trompenaars, F. and Hampden-Turner C. (Eds.) (1997). *Riding the waves of culture. Understanding cultural Diversity in Business*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing

Tutunjian, J. (2002). Merry margins and a happy bottom line to you: inexpensive long-distance calls and the Internet have failed to make a dent on the greeting card market. *Canadian Grocer 116.7 (Sep 2002): 40-42.*

Webster's Dictionary .(2001). Allied Publishing Group, Inc

Wexner, Louis B. (1954), "The Degree to Which Colors (Hues) Are Associated with Mood-Tones," Journal of Applied Psychology, 38(3), pp. 432-435.

Yin R. (2003). Applications of the case study research. London: Sage Publications

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Pilot interview

<u>The main themes of the pilot interview</u>

Objectives:

- to understand whether greeting cards have a positive relation with business communication
- to understand the role palyed by greeting cards and gifts in holidays

1. Greeting cards' relationship with business communication

- Do you usually send greeting cards to your Finnish/Chinese partner companies or Finnish/Chinese clients?
- When do you usually send greeting cards?
- Once the greeting cards are sent, how much percentage of the recipients gives replies?
- Do you think sending greeting cards has a positive effect on inter-company relational maintenance?
- If not sending the greeting cards, is it possible that negative effects exist?

2. Comparison of the role played by greeting cards and gifts in holidays

- Do you usually send gifts to your Finnish/Chinese partner companies or Finnish/Chinese clients?
- When do you usually send these gifts?
- If you send greeting cards and gifts at the same time, how do you balance?

Appendix 2: Theme interview

The main contents of the theme interview

Objectives:

- to figure out why the people from Finnish or Chinese company would choose a certain color and image rather than others
- to understand whether the selection preference is derived from the cultural issues or the business background

1. Main cultural issues in business communication between Finnish and Chinese companies
   - When you communicate with your foreign colleagues abroad, what is the biggest factor you think that might hinder the communication?
   - Have you ever concerned about the cultural issues during the conversation with your Finnish/Chinese colleagues abroad? If yes, what are they? If no, how can you manage other than language barrier?
   - What do you think is the biggest difference between Finnish and Chinese culture?

2. Types of greeting cards
   - How many forms of greeting cards does your company have?
   - What are the pros and cons of paper cards?
   - What are the pros and cons of electronic cards?
   - Which type do you like? Why?
   - In the long-run, which type of greeting cards will continue to use in the future?
   - Do you usually send greeting cards together with small gifts? What are the benefits from the gifts?

3. Preferred color and image of greeting cards

- Does your company change the image of the greeting card every year?
- From your own experience, what color do you prefer to choose? Why?
- When you send greeting card, which factor you concern most? Color? Pattern and design? Texts on the greeting card? The link between the theme of the image and your corporate value? Etc.
- Do you think whether it is highly necessary to match the main color of greeting card with the logo color?
- There are ten images for selection. Assume now it is time to send greeting cards for Christmas. Choose the three pictures or less that are most possibly sent with preference order.
- Why you have chosen the image? The potential meanings of each image are also explained to the interviewees.

4. The etiquette of sending greeting cards

- Can you give me some suggestions about greeting cards? Any kind of suggestions.
- From your own experience, can you give me some tips or reminders, such as the polite way to call the recipienets' names, how to leave a good impression, the requirements of the greeting cards, company service on the greeting cards, etc. ? There are no limits on the tips.