

# A Contrastive Study of Chinese and American University Students' "Friend" Concepts

Cheng Chen

Correspondence: Cheng Chen, School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang Gongshang University, China

Received: June 5, 2015 Accepted: July 21, 2015 Online Published: August 28, 2015

doi:10.11114/jets.v3i6.1059

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/jets.v3i6.1059>

## Abstract

The research aims to get representations and cultural causes of cross-cultural differences in Chinese and American University Students' "friend" concepts by empirical studies including questionnaire and interviews. Based on the statistics of the research, the research analyzes the different interactions of "friends" in different cultures and explores their deep causes from aspects of social organizations, life styles, thinking modes, etc..

**Keywords:** friend; Chinese and Western; contrast; culture

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

"Friend" is an outcome of interpersonal interaction in society, thus it is a comprehensive experience shared by people in different cultures. In Cross-cultural communications, "friends" fill in all the aspects like politics, economics, translations, business and so on. However, there have been many cases of misunderstanding caused by comprehending deviation of the "friend" concepts. It especially exerts great influences in university students who tend to go to foreign environment for further study and establish relations with foreigners at work. According to a survey on the adjustment degrees of university students conducted by Zhejiang University, above 90% percent of Chinese university students studying abroad during their first two years suffered culture shock (a feeling of anxiety, loneliness, and confusion that people sometimes experience when they first arrive in another country). The statistics of the investigation shows the great obstacle to adjustment there is social interrelations. Friendship is one of the most important parts in social relations in the new environment. According to another survey on the living condition of foreign students in China, the success rate for their keeping steady friendship with Chinese students is much lower than the rate or their keeping friendship within their own culture. Therefore, this research analyzes the representation of "friend" concepts of Chinese and American University Students through investigation including its length, customs, etc. The deep causes to the representations including social organizations, life styles, thinking modes, etc..

### 1.2 Research Review

"Friend" is a daily used concept but a rarely-concerned theme in research. The commonly employed existing analysis is the etymology of its word. In ancient Chinese, originally "朋友"(Oral language), "friend" in English, is not one word but a phrase combined with two separate Chinese characters: "朋" and "友". "朋" originally was the monetary unit of measurement. It was defined in *Shuowenjiezi*<sup>1</sup> in the Eastern Han Dynasty as the scene of a group birds gathering together. After that it referred to two or a group of people who have the same objective or the same aspiration. While "友" emphasized someone who are in an intimate friendly relation, for example in *Xuzi*<sup>2</sup> by *Xushen*<sup>3</sup> "友" refers to a verb with the meaning of getting close. In *Mencius*<sup>4</sup> there is a record on the individual character "友": "不挟长, 不挟贵, 不挟兄弟而友。友也者, 友其德也, 不可以有挟也。" The point that differentiates "朋" and "友" among the first is that "朋" referred to "someone who learn together with you" and "友" referred to "someone who shares the same goal,

<sup>1</sup> *Shuowenjiezi* is a dictionary with explanations of the senses and structures of Chinese characters in Eastern Han Dynasty.

<sup>2</sup> A philosophical works in the Warring States Period in ancient China.

<sup>3</sup> Author of *Xuzi*

<sup>4</sup> *Mencius* is a book recording words and deeds of Mencius and his students. Mencius was the great ideologist, educationist and representative scholar of Confucianism in the Warring States Period in ancient China.

idea and faith with you.” During the Spring and Autumn Periods, this differentiation was not less clear. The first time when the two words combined together and appeared as a unit is in *Book of Songs*<sup>5</sup>: “惠于朋友, 庶民小子”<sup>6</sup>, “朋友已谮, 不胥以谷”<sup>7</sup>. In *Analects of Confucius*<sup>8</sup>, the semantic meaning of the word “朋友” is almost indistinguishable with the word in modern Chinese, like the record “与朋友交而不信乎”<sup>9</sup>. As time went by, the usage and connotation of the word evolved gradually and settled down finally as a familiar word people often heard and well remembered. In modern Chinese, the two characters are tinted with the same meaning and are used as pair together. “There are two signifiers in English to refer to the concept of ‘朋友’ in Chinese”: “friend” and “friendship”. The meaning of the English word “friend” is “love and detached freedom” recorded in *Etymology Dictionary. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English(5th edition)* gave the explanation: “Someone who you like very much and like to spend time with”. While Wikipedia interprets “friendship” as : “In a comparison of personal relationships, friendship is considered to be closer than association, although there is a range of degrees of intimacy in both friendships and associations.” This semantic definition is also available in pragmatics for its literal interpretation as one of the personal relationships.

Considering the different interpretations of its word in Chinese and English, some linguists studied English Chinese translation of “friends”. Professor Yang in Chongqing University (2009) analyzed the misinterpretation of the Chinese expression “不三不四的朋友”(Oral language), “dubious friends” in English to the English translation “no-three-no-four friends” and probed into the reason of the misinterpretation. A minority of historians went further from the words into the historical evolution of the concepts in Chinese and Western cultures. Professor He in Hubei University compared Confucius and Aristotle’s concepts on “friend” from two aspects: Xin<sup>10</sup> and Le<sup>11</sup>. He(2006) concluded that Confucius advocates the pleasure of Ren Dao (仁道)- The Way of Ren<sup>12</sup> in “friendship”; while in Aristotle it is the pleasure of Reason.

The existing researches are mainly confined to theoretical analysis of the evolution of the words and concepts. As “friend” is the most commonly employed concept in daily life, its statistics of people’s comprehension and usages is of more research values. Second, though the existing researches involve the comparison of the “friend” expressions and concepts in different cultures, they still stay at the level of analyzing the phenomenon of differences without exploring deeply into the causes in cultures, thinking modes, etc..

This research carries out an investigation on Chinese and American<sup>13</sup> university students’ “friend” concepts, analyzes their differences and explores the deep cultural sources for the phenomenon and reveals its cultural implications.

## 2. Research Design

### 2.1 Subjects

A total of 176 university students as the respondents in Zhejiang province involved in the investigation, among which 88 are Chinese students and 88 are exchange students from America. Because the quantity of the exchange students is settled, the quantity of the Chinese students which is available is determined accordingly. The Chinese students come from grade one to grade four in view of the differences of the research results may cause by the age gap. As the American students for exchange activities are sophomores, the age of subjects is hardly reached as the same as the Chinese students.

### 2.2 Testing Tools

Testing tools include questionnaires and interviews. Because the quantity of research objects is large, the quantitative method is taken as the main tool. Questionnaires are designed with subjective questions on four general aspects: 1.

<sup>5</sup>*The Book of Songs* is the first anthology of poetry in ancient China. It collects 304 poems through 500 year history from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the Spring and Autumn Periods.

<sup>6</sup>The one who is only good on his friends is a base person.

<sup>7</sup> Friends who cannot trust each other and help each other.

<sup>8</sup>*Analects of Confucius* is a collection recording the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples. Confucius is the founder of the Confucian culture whose ideology is the essence of Chinese culture. *The Analects of Confucius* is a concentrated expression of the profound Confucian ideology. It is an important early Confucian classics in the history of Chinese civilization and takes up an extremely important position in Chinese nation’s political, economic, moral and ethical aspects of development and national way of thinking.

<sup>9</sup>Have I been credible while interacting with my friends?

<sup>10</sup> “Xin” in Chinese means “making good on ones’ word, faithfulness”

<sup>11</sup> “Le” in Chinese means “pleasure”

<sup>12</sup> “Ren” in Chinese means Humanity

<sup>13</sup> The term employed here represents the US mainstream.

Nationality, age, sex and other personal background information. This part of investigation aims to eliminate the research objects with uncontrollable factors, for example, the age is out of the range from 18 to 25. 2. The comprehension of the “friend” concept. 3. The interactive customs in friends on their own culture. 4. Their experience of the interaction with friends. In consideration of the limitation of the information delivered through the questionnaire paper, interviews are carried out as the auxiliary means to collect more profound information.

### 3. Result and Analysis

Based on the information collected from the investigation, the statistics of the description “friend” concepts in the two cultures are summarized and classified in three key words: type, length and communicative way, among which “types” was described as the subjects’ current friends’ types including their relations, and how they get known. The “length” and “communicative ways” were based on the subjects’ experience and customs. The percentages of each key word in the total of each country’s students are presented in the following table. The statistics in the “types” and “length” are the percentages of the amount of friends under each categorized word to the total amount of friends of the subject group.

Table 1. The percentage of the current friend types of Chinese and American university students

Types	Classmates <sup>14</sup>	Colleagues <sup>15</sup>	Family members	Fellow members from associations	Teachers	Travel mates	Other types
Chinese	30%	5%	17%	8%	18%	3%	19%
American	25%	22%	0	25%	0	0	28%

Table 2. The percentage in the length of the “friendship” in Chinese and American university students’ concepts

Length	<1 year	1~2 years	3~5 years	6~10 years	Above 10 years	Whole life	For generations
Chinese	3%	14%	33%	10%	23%	12%	5%
American	26%	35%	18%	4%	10%	7%	0

The statistics in the “communicative ways” is different as it is the incidence in communication with friends. The selections of each column are in multiple choices. Thus the percentages in this part are without a totality as its dividend and the total numbers added by all the percentages of the columns for Chinese category and American category are above 100%.

Table 3. The percentage of the communicative ways with friends of Chinese and American university students

Communicative way	See each other regularly	Speak directly	Say “I love you” to each other	Body touching
Chinese	35%	58%	5%	76%
American	84%	85%	98%	47%

#### 3.1 Type

From table1, we can see “friend” types of Chinese students are more variably presented than American students’. In China, as the original references of the two components, “朋” (footnote1)and “友”(footnote 2), diversified tremendously, its references in modern society have a variety. The relations of couples, brothers, classmates, colleagues, associates or someone you are familiar with all can be considered as “friendships”. The differences of “friends” in these relations are difficult to define and sometimes are muddled up. These “friends” may have different standpoints and stay in different positions, offering mutual aids mutually. These types of relationships are productions of historical evolution in Chinese society. To some degree, the word “friend” has a metonymy turning into a “generalized word” in usage. It even can be taken as a backing address to explain the relation while all the other relations are hardly defined. So it is more comprehensively applied and employed more frequently with the equalized word in Western culture.

The concept of “friend” in America is with clearer boundary. “Friends”, there usually refer to someone in a specific area. The ties that bind “friends” together are as pure as a hobby in common, the same standpoint and shared interest and so on. For example, even the hobby of wine-tasting would make a match of “friends”. Two disappointed lovers may confess their pain, share their experience and become “friends”. The fact that you are proficient in English politics or one of the die-hard fan of the Premiership<sup>16</sup> would win you a large circle of friends. However, colleagues and classmates are not equated to “friends” for they are more cautious to employ the word “friend” to define others.

<sup>14</sup> Classmates refer to students who are in the same class.

<sup>15</sup> Colleagues refer to the students who work together in students’ union or other organizations both in school or out of school.

<sup>16</sup> In England, Premiership is the league in which the best football teams play.

### 3.2 Length

From table2, there is a higher percentage of the statistics of the Chinese students in the range of above five years. While the statistics of the American students shows that there is a higher rate of short-term friendship and no rate of friendship for generations. For Chinese people, as soon as the “friendship” is established, it will not be changed easily even with the passage of time and pulling away in distance. There are idioms in Chinese as the evidence to this concept like “竹马之友<sup>17</sup>” and “青梅竹马<sup>18</sup>”. The “friendship” will even be expected to extend to offsprings for several generations which are advocated and respected by Chinese people as “数代世交<sup>19</sup>”.

Relatively speaking, the “friendship” in America is more dynamic. The circle of “friends” changes all the time with environmental factors varying like work, habitation, school and so on. The changes of time and distance estrange old friends and new friends fill in the new life accordingly. By contrast, the effect of time and distance is weaker to the friends’ relation for Chinese, as a famous poem written by Wang Bo<sup>20</sup> in Tang dynasty: “海内存知己，天涯若比邻<sup>21</sup>”.

### 3.3 Communication Ways

From Table3, we can see Chinese tend to speak indirectly. Because Chinese people “observe etiquette and manners”, think highly of “人情<sup>22</sup>” in friends. Therefore, even in cases of conflicts, “friends” spare feelings to some extent, at least to saving one’s face. Falling out before the very eyes does not usually happen for it turns your friend “下不来台<sup>23</sup>”. Chinese “friends” are more conservative to develop a relation. Before the trust step, they would get the whole picture of one’s personal details. There is a long way to go from acquaintances to intimates, which shows the doctrine held by Chinese idiom: “路遥知马力，日久见人心<sup>24</sup>”. Even close friends may guard tongue in certain fields. Comparatively American friends chat directly without reserve, even on topics like sex which is a taboo for Chinese.

Chinese friends are not used to express their feelings openly. Expressions like “I miss you” or “I love you” are rarely delivered. According to the statistics, American students spoke “I love you” in their daily life with a frequency with 93% higher than the frequency of Chinese.

But the body touching for Americans is not so frequent with 47% compared with Chinese, the result of which is different from the habitual thinking that Americans are more open than Chinese in social interaction. From the following interviews more detailed information has been collected: in America adult friends of the same sex are not common to have close body touching often like walking hand in hand or arm in arm which is supposed as homosexual behaviors. While it is common for especially young adult female friends having intimate behaviors including hand holding, while the intimate behaviors in heterosexual couples in China are criticized as “over-open”.

## 4. Cultural Sources

The different concepts of “friends” in Chinese and Western students are influenced by their different culture backgrounds including social organizations, life styles, historical experiences, thinking modes and so on.

### 4.1 Social Organization

First, the distinctive social organizational way determines communicative habits of “friends”. The Chinese culture mode can be summarized as “annular”, which means all the elements in the circle are centripetal to the center. It is reflected by the psychological trend of collectivism in Chinese society. (Zuo, 2001, 68) Such a feature generates Chinese “Quanzi (circle)” culture which dominates all fields and situations in the society. According to the historical research, “Quanzi (circle)” culture was originated from thousands of years’ farming history in China when people were self-sufficient and self-contained and family was both the producing unit and living unit. In ancient times, extremely changeable weather caused frequent natural disasters. In order to resist disasters, different families were combined together, thus blood relationship was the primary tie to link the specific circle and productive practice. In another aspect, circles propelled the formation of other social circles. Among these circles, “friends” is one of the types connected by non blood ties where the personnel and relation are not only stable and static, but also closed and

<sup>17</sup> A friendship formed in childhood—said of boys and girls who play childhood games of riding on a bamboo stick for a horse.

<sup>18</sup> With the similar meaning of “竹马之友”.

<sup>19</sup> Friendship spanning two or more generations.

<sup>20</sup> Wang Bo (650/649 AD-675/676 AD) was an ancient poet in Tang Dynasty. He is considered as one of the Four Great Poets of Early Tang Dynasty.

<sup>21</sup> A bosom friend afar brings a distant land near.

<sup>22</sup> Human feelings.

<sup>23</sup> Unable to find a way out of an embarrassing situation.

<sup>24</sup> A distant journey tests the strength of a horse and a long task proves the character of a man.

exclusive. (Wang, 2009, 128) That is the reason why Chinese need a longer time to establish and develop a friendship comparatively.

Meanwhile, each circle is the miniature of the whole society which is overlapped and lined up by various circles. In the background of “circle culture”, the structure of the society is like a “net” with thousands of “knots” where circles are connected by “ethics and morals” together. Zeng(2009) in his *Book China of Circles* described Chinese people as living in circles: the society is structured as onion bulb which are linked by “Renqing”(human relation), “Qinqing”(family love), “Xiangqin”(provincialism), “friendship”, etc. This is a big environment which is impossible to separate from. Furthermore, the circle structure tallies with China’s hierarchical social concept. “Quanzi(circle)” is divided by inside and outside. The inside is composed of three parts which are center, subcenter and edge. To the society, “Quanzi(circle)” itself is a center and the center has its own center. (See picture1) Thus, each person of the circle has different rights, responsibilities, physical and mental degree of freedom, etc, based on their different positions. (Wang, 2009,128) Those in the outside are difficult to get inside.

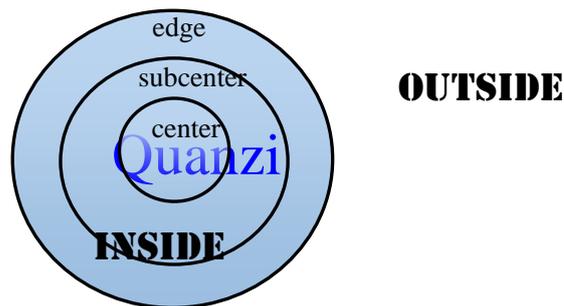


Figure 1. “Circle culture” of Western culture

The degrees of closeness and distance of “friends” is like the ripple produced by a stone thrown into the river which produces a circle to another, the farther the more distant. (Fei, 1998) In the same case, the relation of friends in China extends like the ripples in complicated layers.

In America, The “linear” mode of Western culture represents as the individual straight line forging ahead. An individual is an independent point separated from other points. It proceeds towards the self selected direction and develops along a self-realizing line.(Figure2) Different strait lines are usually parallel with each other, so individualism is advocated in the Western society. (Zuo, 2002)

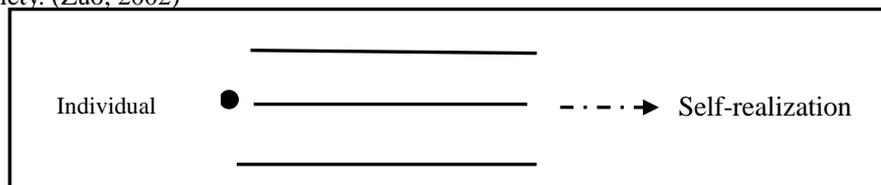


Figure 2. “Linear” mode of Western culture

Individualism in Western society is greatly emphasized. The English people link their own emotion to planetary influence and the natural elements, so they prefer analytical logic thinking. Target objects are subordinated into small parts in order to be scrutinized, which, of course, may lead them to place the components before the whole when they try to know something.(Joseph A., 2012) The interpersonal relationship originated from “social contract theory” which was first put forward by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurean. He claimed that people would be willing to make promises of mutual non-aggression of their own accords for their well beings, based on which country, law and other social orders came out. So country was originally established through contracts signed by people. (Liu, 2001) The communicative mode of “social contract theory” emphasizes the rights and responsibilities, justice and rationality between individuals and between individual and units. The relation of “friends” in America is contract-like. If it is in accordance with the stipulations, friendship is established. In turn, it breaks up as the rules are violated. Compared with Chinese friendship, the Western mode is not so complicated which is reflected as the variability of the friendship in Western society.

Of course, the circle culture is a general cultural phenomenon which also exists in Western culture. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1994) deems that circle is a necessary tool for expanding research vision from traditional society to developed society in socialist studies. However, compared with the “Quanzi (circle)” in Chinese culture, though Americans attach importance to one’s inner circle, they treat insiders and outsiders relatively impartially and the outsiders are easier to transmit into the circle as an insider. This is because Westerners conceive the concept of

individualism of treating people as independent individuals, so their circles are comparatively dynamic. The insiders are willing to make friends with people outside and they will not constrain themselves inside. (Zhang, 2008) Walking out the small circle and entering the bigger one is most people's aspiration. This is the reason why Westerners' "friendship" is more changeable.

#### 4.2 Life Styles

Second, different life styles are the external cause. For Chinese, as soon as they settled down, the residences are fixed and they rarely choose to move. The Chinese idiom "叶落归根"<sup>25</sup> mirrors the concept that hometown is the destination of life and residence is the land of root. Because of this thinking mode, Chinese people take buying house as the most important event of one's life and a great event in their lives and are willing to be mortgage slaves for an entire life. Most of the people shift for a long way which takes hours from their house to working place in big cities. In Chinese custom it is also a responsibility for Chinese parents to buy a house for their son for his marriage. All aspects including jobs, families, and interpersonal relations in life are around the center of "house", which is reflected by an idiom in Chinese: "远亲不如近邻"<sup>26</sup>. Many Chinese people live in the same place or in the same residence for all their lives or even for several generations. Accordingly, the relation of "friends" in traditional Chinese culture is stable which breeds cultural products like the Chinese expressions: "祖宅"<sup>27</sup> and "世交"<sup>28</sup>. In comparison, America is called "the country on wheel" where people move more often. Renting house is much more popular than buying house. They move for various reasons like a beautiful environment, less taxes, lower cost of living, even for a restaurant with delicious food. Even American companies like Microsoft and Coca Cola would pay the relocation fee for emigrated employees. With this life style, friends in Western societies are always in variation with the change of habitats and jobs. In another aspect, family arrangements in the United States reflect the nature of contemporary American society, as they always have, which refers to the increasing age at which young Americans leaving out of their parental home. "Traditionally, a person past "college age" who lived with his parents is viewed negatively, but today it is not uncommon for children to live with their parents until their mid-twenties." (Brian W. & Stacey C. & Carl M.)

#### 4.3 Historical Experiences and National Values

Different historical experiences and national values are the fundamental causes to different interaction behaviors in Chinese and American friends. Homosexual phenomenon is a ubiquitous behavior mode in all cultures. In China, the earliest record on homosexuality is *Za Shuo*<sup>29</sup>: "变童始于黄帝"<sup>30</sup>, from which it can be inferred that homosexuality existed in period of tribes and clans in ancient China. The *Book of Songs*<sup>31</sup> described love scenes of gays in the Chapter of *Zhengfeng*. The literary quotation "龙阳之好", from *Strategies of the Warring States*<sup>32</sup>, was originated from the allusion of love between Emperor Wei and Longyang Jun during the warring States period in ancient China. But in traditional Chinese culture, sex and homosexuality are issues which were covered underground and were not believed and accepted not only in public but also in private. Therefore, throughout the history it seemed that the concept of homosexuality never existed as a social phenomenon in people's mind. Although there is no obvious and severe degree of homophobia in Chinese society, the wide ignorance of homosexuality is unbelievable for Westerners. The reasons for it can be summarized on two sides. For one thing, Chinese culture laid emphasis on "procreation value". As homosexuals cannot produce off-springs, they had not been concerned with great attention. For another, Chinese people are full of complacency to their own culture which is with an over five thousand year history. They are never anxious for being replaced by exotic cultures. Therefore, the non-mainstream culture or the abnormal elements would rather be ignored than be persecuted. Besides the analysis above, the restrains of the behavioral norms between males and females in feudal ethics are more highly concerned. Those feudal teachings like "饿死事小,失节事大"<sup>33</sup>, from *The*

<sup>25</sup> Falling leaves settle on their roots—a person residing elsewhere finally returns to his ancestral home.

<sup>26</sup> A distant relative is not as good as a near neighbor.

<sup>27</sup> Ancestral house

<sup>28</sup> Friendship spanning two or more generations.

<sup>29</sup> *Za Shuo* is an ancient book with a collection of argumentative essays. "Shuo" is a genre to expound over a principle through comments and narrations.

<sup>30</sup> As early as the period of Emperor Huangdi there were boys who had sexual relationship with men.

<sup>31</sup> *Book of Songs* is the first anthology of verse in China which collected 305 verses of 500 years' history from the early Western Zhou Dynasty to the middle of Spring and Autumn Period.

<sup>32</sup> *Strategies of the Warring States* is a famous historical book in ancient China. It conceives essays of events of dynasties with 240 years of Western Zhou Dynasty, Eastern Zhou Dynasty, Qin Dynasty, Qi Dynasty, Chu Dynasty, Zhao Dynasty, Han Dynasty, Wei Dynasty, Yan Dynasty, Song Dynasty, Wei Dynasty, Zhongshan Dynasty.

<sup>33</sup> I would rather starve to death than lose my chastity.

*Analects of Chengs*<sup>34</sup>, “男女授受不亲<sup>35</sup>” from *Mencius* are deeply rooted among the people, so Chinese are more sensitive to the behavior of opposite sexes instead of homosexuals.

While in America, homosexual movement sprouted as early as in World War II. Until present, the status of homosexuals have changed a lot. Many states legalized same-sex marriage which is still disputable. In addition, Sexual Revolution had developed highly which changed people's realization. Therefore, Americans are more sensitive to homosexual relation instead of opposite sex relation.

#### 4.4 Thinking Modes

Different thinking modes generate different “friend” concepts in Chinese and Western societies. Thinking mode is closely related with culture in two aspects. On the one hand, it is the epitome of the features of cultural psychology. On the other, it plays the restrictive function to these psychological features. The traditional small-scale peasant economy in ancient China cultivated the consciousness of “天人合一<sup>36</sup>” and “万物一体<sup>37</sup>”. Such an integrative thinking mode leads Chinese people to put the sky, earth, man, nature, society and life as an entirety while observing their relations. Accordingly, Chinese people formed a comprehensive and integrated communication way, so the relations of “friends” permeate through all aspects of one's life and they are more complicated in types. While Westerners tend to think with the mode of logicity which separates the entirety into several categories and divides complicated phenomenon into specific details and simple data, then observes and studies the functions, relations, properties of these elements. (Lian, 2001) Americans learn objects this way too. Therefore in American culture, “friendship” is concretized as referring to a relation in a certain aspect. While the concept of “friend” in Chinese culture is more generalized in which the boundary between “friend” and “non-friend” is ambiguous.

The traditional Chinese philosophy binds the essence of man with ethnics. The semi-closed continental environment and the small scaled farming economy fed up Confucianism. The philosophers of the past represented by Confucianism cognized the world, first through the concerns with social politics, ethics and morals instead of the curiosity to the nature. (Lian, 2001) The culture of “Quanzi”(circle) corroborates the ethnic thinking mode in Confucianism. The ethnic thinking mode is the concept put forward by professor Liang(1987) in *Essence of Chinese Culture*. It refers to the hierarchical order in people which defines the oriented relationship of Chinese people. There are two aspects conceived in the concept. First, social persons are always in “伦” which refers to relations between the monarch and his subjects, father and son, husband and wife, brothers, friends and so on. (Liang, 1987) The “Quanzi”(circle) they stay is defined according to the division and definition of these relations. Second, these different relations are in different classifications. In another word, the relations between the monarch and his subjects, father and son, etc. are with divisions of superior and inferior, gentle and simple, upper and lower, senior and junior, close and distant degrees. These regulations in relations determine one's position in the circle. (Li, 2008, 54) Hence, “friends” here are divided into different types and layers with different degrees of closeness and distance, to which the communicative ways are employed in tremendous variety. By contrast, the American philosophy stipulates the essence of human as cognitive, so they make friends by learning the other's hobbies, thoughts, standpoints and so on.

## 5. Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can see that though “friends” are cherished by both the Chinese cultures and American culture (which is a branch of Western culture), the concepts and the communicative ways differ greatly. These representations of differences are originated from different Social Organization, life styles, historical experiences and national values, thinking modes and so on. Without the realization of the differences, failure in intercultural communications would happen. In turn, learning the cultural causes to these differences with a tolerant and open attitude will improve the communicative ability in cross-cultural contexts.

## Acknowledgement

This essay is supported by Project of Zhejiang Provincial Association of Social Sciences, Project Number: 2013N203.

## References

- Bourdieu, P. (1994). *Questions de sociologie*, Paris: Minuit.
- Brian, W., Stacey, C., & Carl, M. (2005). *Marriages, Families & Intimate Relationships*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

<sup>34</sup> *The Analects of Chengs* is a book written by the students of Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi who were the two parapsychologists in Northern Song Dynasty to record their daily words and deeds. It reflects the development and characteristics of physiological thoughts in Northern Song Dynasty.

<sup>35</sup> It is improper for men and women to touch each other's hand in passing objects

<sup>36</sup> unity of man and nature

<sup>37</sup> the Oneness in all things

- Fei, X. T. (1998). *Rural China*. Peking: Peking University Press.
- He, Y. G. (2006). Confucius and Aristotle on Friend: A Comparative Study. *Studies in Ethics*, 1(03), 47-52.
- Joseph, A. (2012). *The Interpersonal Communication Book* [M]. Longman, eighth edition.
- Li, Q. Q., & Q, Q. (2008). A Study on Chinese “Relation”. *Journal of Zhejiang Provincial Party School*, 3(2), 53-54.
- Lian, S. N. (2001). A Study of Chinese and Western Thinking Modes. *Social Science*, 12(10), 28-34.
- Liang, S. M. (1987). *Chinese Cultural Essentials*. Nanjing: Xueling Press.
- Liu, T. Y. (2001). A Contrastive Study of Chinese and Western Interpersonal Relationship Modes. *Fujian Journal of Agriculture University (SOCIAL SCIENCE EDITION)*, 1(1), 50-52.
- Wang, R. P. (2009). A Study of “Quanzi” Culture. *Academic Communication*, 11(3), 126-129.
- Yang, R. (2009). Analysis of Causes to Misinterpretation of “不三不四的朋友” in Chinese into “no-three-no-four friends” in English. *Theoretical Exploration*, 7(1), 138-139.
- Zhang, B. Y. (2008). “Quanzi” Culture in International Communication. *China's Science and Fortune*, 12(10), 133-135.
- Zhang, H. C. (2002). *Psychology*. Tianjing: Nankai University Press.
- Zuo, B. (2001). Annular and Linear: A Contrastive Study of Chinese and Western Cultural Features. *Social Science*, 12(11), 198-202.

