

D10 Mai / China / German Studies

Interaction partner(s): German student
Moment of enquiry: WS 08/09
Experience of difference: Contact rituals and proxemics

Mai is from Shanghai and studies German. She is spending one semester in Germany, and is meeting a lot of new people. Soon she gets to know Sarah, a German student, also studying German. The two girls get along well, and they also talk about personal matters. Mai thinks she's found a good friend in Sarah and wants to show her that. So when they are walking together on campus, Mai links arms with Sarah. Sarah is startled, pulls her arms back and steps back from her Chinese fellow student. Mai is embarrassed. Maybe Sarah does not want to be friends with her after all? What did she do wrong?

1. What does this gesture mean to Mai, and what are her intentions?
2. How does the German interpret the Chinese student' behaviour? Why does the physical contact bother her?