

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF ASIAN STUDENT PREFERENCES CONCERNING  
CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN UNIVERSITY SETTINGS

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by

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Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

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**Abstract**

As more Asian students have enrolled at Morehead State University (MSU), intercultural communication has become a significant issue. This study is intended to describe in an empirical manner what is occurring with the intercultural communication between Asian students and American students at MSU. A special focus of the study is on two aspects: (1) the extent to which intercultural communication occurs between the two groups and (2) the extent to which Asian students are satisfied in their communication with American students. These aspects are examined in four different settings: in the classroom, interaction with an advisor, social activities on-campus, and social activities off-campus. An anonymous self-administered questionnaire was administered to 115 Asian students at MSU in

December, 2001. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of this study showed that Asian students have faced difficulties in interacting with American students due to language barriers. In general, the more confidence Asian students have in their English ability, the more intercultural communication occurred. Asian students reported that they did not interact often with American students or advisors, or with off-campus community members. However, the results of the study showed that they would like to interact with Americans more in their school life. To improve intercultural communication in the university setting, a better understanding between American students and Asian students is important. More support to improve the campus environment in ways that will further this objective by school staff and community members is also needed.

Accepted by: Robert E. Frank, Chair  
Timothy M. Ashmore  
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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

As the number of international students has increased at colleges and universities in the U.S., intercultural communication among students has become a significant issue. In 1990, almost 450,000 international or foreign students were enrolled in American colleges and universities, accounting for 2.9% of the total student enrollment. A close examination by country of origin shows that Asian students account for over half of all international students (Gisela-Lin, 1996; Zikopolus, Sutton, & Julian, 1991). A large number of these students come from the East Asian countries. According to a report published by the New York based Institute of International Education (IIE), the largest Asian nationalities represented in U.S. schools in 1996 were Japan with 45,531, China with 39,613, Korea with 36,231, and Taiwan with 32,272.

The growing desire of American firms to expand their scope in Asia is paralleled by the increasing number of Asian students who are studying in the U.S. A majority of Asian students studying in the United States report that upon graduation, they would prefer to work for a foreign multinational corporation. According to a survey of Asian students in U.S. universities conducted by the New Jersey firm International Career Information (ICI), 89 % of students queried said they would prefer to work for an American company in their home country rather than an Asian-based firm (Drobrick, 1994).

Although most Asian students come to the U.S. with a desire to learn and experience U.S. culture, it is difficult for them to adjust to American culture or the U.S. education system due to communication problems. They often have a conflict dealing with language barriers or cultural differences.

### **Justification**

In the past few years, more and more Asian students have enrolled in MSU. Since the English Language Center (ELC) program started at MSU in 1999, the number of Asian students on campus has increased rapidly. Almost all of the students in the ELC program are Asian students. In September 2001, the total number of students enrolled in MSU was 9,027. There were 128 Asian students taking regular courses out of the total of 167 international students. In the ELC program, 18 students out of 22 total students were from Asian countries. Some Asian students who come to MSU already know what they would like to do in their future career. They want to learn not only the English language, but also special skills for their areas of study. Other students are interested specifically in American culture, so they come to MSU in order to learn English communication skills and American culture. While some students go back to their own countries immediately after graduating, others would prefer to stay longer and gain work experience in the U.S. for a few years. Asian students expect the degree or work experience in the U.S. to be helpful for their future career whether they are planning to look for a job in the U.S. or in their own countries.

Because having numerous Asian students at MSU is a relatively new trend, and also due to the cultural background of many of Morehead's American students, American students at MSU do not readily accept intercultural communication with Asian students. They seem unequipped to deal with the social and classroom interaction between themselves and Asian students. Asian students also seem awkward in communicating with American students. Compared to other international students, Asian students seem to experience more communication problems and difficulties in their school life, mainly due to the language barrier (Oropeza, Fitzgibbon, & Baron, 1991). Therefore, this study focuses specifically on Asian students at MSU.

The findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge which may lead to the development of an environment which is more comfortable for Asian students and to a better understanding of the process of intercultural communication between Americans and Asian students. The results will thus contribute to improving intercultural communication in the community.

## **Review of Literature**

### **• Asian students adjustment**

Previous studies have found insights into cross-cultural differences among different groups of international students. For example, Mack and Tucker (1997) examined the ethnic climate and relationships between ethnic groups at five colleges in the U.S. In their study, Asian students expressed the greatest discomfort in

interacting with students from all other ethnic groups. Carsky (1994) indicated that Korean students expressed a desire for American friendships, but did not know how to go about establishing them.

Heikinheimo (1986) studied international students at a Canadian university and found that isolated and dissatisfied Asians indicated either language problems or personal difficulties in making friends. Heikinheimo reported, "As students' use of the English language improves, social and academic adjustment becomes less of a problem, and cultural learning and adjustment become easier" (p. 405).

Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) reported that East Asian students experienced more isolation, alienation, depression, and discrimination than other international students. Asian students' reluctance to socialize with non-Asians is related to their own lack of English proficiency. The lack of language proficiency can hamper not only academic progress but also the social adjustment of East Asian students.

Although most foreign students experience some adjustment problems due to language proficiency, East Asian students in particular may experience more stress since they originate from countries where English is not widely spoken (Chung, Ding, & Perez, 1998).

Surdam and Collins (1984) studied over 300 international students enrolled at a university in the western part of the United States. These researchers found that international students "who spent more of their leisure time with Americans were significantly better adapted than those who spent more leisure time with fellow citizens of their own country" (p. 243). They also found that international students

who reported adequate oral English skills when they arrived in the United States were better adjusted to American life than those who felt their oral English skills were inadequate.

Also, Zimmermann (1995) found that frequency of interaction with American students was strongly related to both student satisfaction with their communication and student adjustment to American life. Neither length of stay in the United States nor number of semesters spent attending university was statistically related to students' satisfaction with their communication or overall adjustment to American life (p. 328).

Manese, Sedlacek, and Leong (1988) found significant differences between female and male international students' adjustment to the university and comfort with talking in class; however, no differences were detected between women and men in terms of overall adjustment to American culture and self-reported comfort in interacting on-campus. Also, no significant differences were identified between undergraduate and graduate students on any of the measured behaviors.

Oropeza, Fitzgibbon, and Baron (1991) reported that the stress is amplified among students from China, Japan, and Korea due to the fact that the only official languages in those countries are their native languages. Also, Lin and Yi (1997) reported, "Many Asian international students experience the following: pressure from academic demands, language barriers, financial concerns, performance anxiety, depression, loneliness, homesickness, relationship problems, nonassertiveness,

individualism and bicultural conflicts, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and paranoia” (p. 478).

- **Cultural Characteristics**

In regard to Asian culture, one of the major characteristics of the Asian communication style is using less verbal language, or using what is termed indirect communication methods. Yum (1988) indicated that Eastern cultures, especially those under the influence of Confucianism, emphasize indirect communication in which “the receiver’s sensitivity and ability to capture the under-the surface meaning and to discern implicit meaning becomes critical” (p. 385). If the interactants reach the ideal of “same-heartedness,” verbal language becomes unnecessary for communicating. This orientation totally deemphasizes the importance of self-disclosure in the process of communication. In contrast, Westerners, especially Americans, rely heavily on language skills to judge the degree of the speaker’s competence in an interaction, inferring that self-disclosure is a critical basis for evaluating the degree of an individual’s communication effectiveness. In contrast, to Asians, a person who interacts successfully is not the one who talks more or shows more feelings in the message, but the one who knows what he or she is talking about and knows how to show positive and honest attitudes in the process of disclosing to others (Chen, 1993; Tsujima, 1987; Yum, 1998).

International students from Asian countries are often stereotyped as quiet, reserved and non-assertive. These cultures place an emphasis on harmony and

respect for authorities. Therefore, many of them are reluctant to share their feelings or emotions, or to express their opinions or opposition to anyone, especially to authority figures. Thus, instead of emphasizing personal rights and assertive communication, Asians tend to emphasize the importance of patience, harmony, respect and deference. Asian cultures tend to place a high value on team efforts or collectivity, whereas Western culture tends to emphasize individualism. International students, especially Asians, feel uncomfortable with this individualism and also with the competitiveness associated with American culture (Lin & Yi, 1997).

Ruth Benedict described the Japanese culture as a “shame culture.” They are conscious of “haji” or shame in personal relationships. Japanese people often do not speak their opinions because they are afraid of making mistakes. A cultural background such as this might affect Asian students’ interactions with American students. This fear of mistakes combined with even a slight lack of confidence in English ability can result in a strong aversion to attempting new social interactions with Americans (Dinner, 1999).

According to these previous studies, Asian students studying in the U.S. have less interaction with other students and feel more discomfort with their interactions than other international students. This is due to the language barrier and their different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out how much intercultural communication takes place in the university life of Asian students and also whether they are satisfied with their intercultural interaction. If they are not, how can intercultural communication be improved?

## **Research Question**

The general research question of this study is “What is occurring in the intercultural communication of Asian students with American students at MSU?”

This general question is examined by the following two sub-questions: (1) To what extent are Asian students engaged in intercultural communication with American students and the local community in Morehead? and (2) How satisfied are MSU’s Asian students in their interaction with American students and the community?

In Chapter I, the purpose of this study, review of literature, and research questions were discussed. According to previous study, the number of the international students has increased more and more in American universities or colleges and over half of the international students are from East Asian countries. Compared to other international students, Asian students face more problems in communicating with Americans due to the language barrier. Based on these previous studies, above research questions were designed. This study was only focused on Asian students at MSU. The next chapter describes how this study was conducted and the data was analyzed.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

The data was collected from 115 Asian students enrolled at MSU. This represents the majority of the Asian student population (146) at MSU. The nationalities of participants were Mainland China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. An anonymous self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. The data collection was conducted in the first and second weeks of December, 2001. The researcher asked permission from the president of the Cosmopolitan Club (international students club) and the Director of ELC to administer the questionnaires. The data collection was conducted in a Cosmopolitan Club meeting in December. In the ELC program, a questionnaire form was distributed to level 6 students only. Level 6 is the highest level, and students in that level are taking one regular MSU course, so they have a greater opportunity to interact with American students than students in lower levels, who usually only interact with other international students. Participation was totally voluntary. The results were confidential and were used only for the purposes of this study. The data was analyzed in a descriptive manner, presenting frequency and distribution. Since the data collected ( $n = 115$ ) represent nearly the total population of target Asian students, only Microsoft Excel was used, and there is no use of inferential statistics.

The first part of the questionnaire (See Appendix A) consists of participant demographics such as gender, nationality, and major. Some other questions were

asked in order to study the degree of Asian students' intercultural communication with American students and the degree of Asian students' confidence in their English communication abilities. These questions included such items as how many hours Asian students interact with American students in a week, what percentage of their free time Asian students spend interacting with American students, and how much confidence Asian students have in their English ability? According to previous studies, Asian students face communication problems with American students due to a language barrier. Based on these previous studies, these questions in the first part were asked to find out if there is a relationship between Asian students' confidence in their English skills and the degree of their intercultural communication with American students.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of fifteen Likert type questions. Participants were asked to select a numerical answer between 1 and 5 for each question to describe their feelings (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Those questions were designed to find out the degree of Asian students' interaction with Americans and their satisfaction in four different university settings: classroom, advisor, social activities on-campus, and social activities off-campus. Considering the results of the many previous studies, the results were expected to show that Asian students would not interact with Americans often in each of the four different settings and that they would not be satisfied with their intercultural communication.

In the last part, the participants were asked how they think they could improve their communication with American students. Although the previous studies

indicated that English competency was a key point for international students to increase their interaction with American students, the reactions by MSU's Asian students to this question may suggest other solutions. For this question, the possible answers are expected to depend on the person. Therefore, an open-ended question was used.

In Chapter III, the demographics, intercultural communication, English competency, and satisfaction of Asian students are described in some detail, with accompanying tables providing specific breakdowns of the numbers according to various criteria.

## Chapter 3

### Demographics

The first part of the questionnaire deals with participants' demographics. Out of 115 respondents, 38 were male and 77 were female students. As for the nationalities, 75 of the participants were from Taiwan. The second largest population of the participants was Mainland China (18); other countries were as follows: Japan (9), Korea (9), Hong Kong (2), Malaysia (1) (See Table 1). Their majors were Communication (27), Business (25), Music (12), and Education (10). The twenty-three students who majored in Communication were graduate students, and all of them were from Taiwan. Also, 21 students majoring in Business were in the MBA program, and most of them were from Mainland China or Taiwan (See Table 2). The range of Asian students' ages was from 18 to 38; the average age was 25. Because many of the Asian students enrolling at MSU were graduate students, the average age of participants was comparatively high. In fact, 76 respondents, over 65 % of the total number, were graduate students (See Table 3). In regard to the length of time spent in the U.S.A., the times range from 4 months to 11 years 3 months; the average was 1 year 10 months. Sixty-nine students, or 60 % of the total, reported that they have been staying in the U.S. between 1 year and 2 years (See Table 4).

**Table 1** Participants' Gender by Nationality

Gender/Countries	China	Hong Kong	Japan	Korea	Malaysia	Taiwan	Blank	Total
Male	8	0	4	6	0	19	1	38
Female	10	2	5	3	1	56	0	77
Total	18	2	9	9	1	75	1	115

**Table 2** Majors by Nationality

Majors/Countries	China	HK	Japan	Korea	Malaysia	Taiwan	Blank	Total
Accounting	1							1
Art	1					4		5
Biology		1	1					2
Business			1	1		2		4
CIS	1			3		3		7
Communication				2		25		27
Construction						1		1
Dietetics			1			1		2
Education	1					9		10
Electronics						2		2
English	1		1			1		3
Government			1					1
Hotel Restaurant Management			1			1		2
Industrial Education & Technology	3				1			4
International Education						1		1
Manufacturing Robotics						2		2
MBA	8			1		11	1	21
Music	1		1	1		9		12
Nursing						1		1
Psychology			1					1
Sociology Criminology	1	1	1	1				4
Sports Administration/ Recreation						2		2
Total	18	2	9	9	1	75	1	115

**Table 3      Classification in School by Nationality**

Year/Countries	China	HK	Japan	Korea	Malaysia	Taiwan	Blank	Total
ESL				1		6		7
Freshman	1			3		2		6
Sophomore			5	1		7		13
Junior		1		1		3		5
Senior	1		3	1	1	2		8
Graduate	16	1	1	2		55	1	76
Total	18	2	9	9	1	75	1	115

**Table 4      The Length of Time Staying in the U.S.**

Length of Time	Number of students
0 - 6 months	8
More than 6 months to 1 year	17
More than 1 year to 2 years	59
More than 2 years to 3 years	20
More than 3 years to 4 years	5
More than 4 years	5
Total	114

Two-thirds of the total participants were female. Two-thirds of the total were from Taiwan. Fifty-two students, or 45 %, were majoring in either Communication or Business. The average age of participants was 25 years old, and two-thirds of the total were graduate students. Twenty-five Asian students, 21.7 % of the total, have been staying in the U.S.A. for 1 year or less than 1 year. Fifty-nine students, 51.3 %, have been staying in the U.S.A. for more than 1 year up to 2 years. Thirty students, 26.1 %, have been staying in the U.S.A. for more than 2 years.

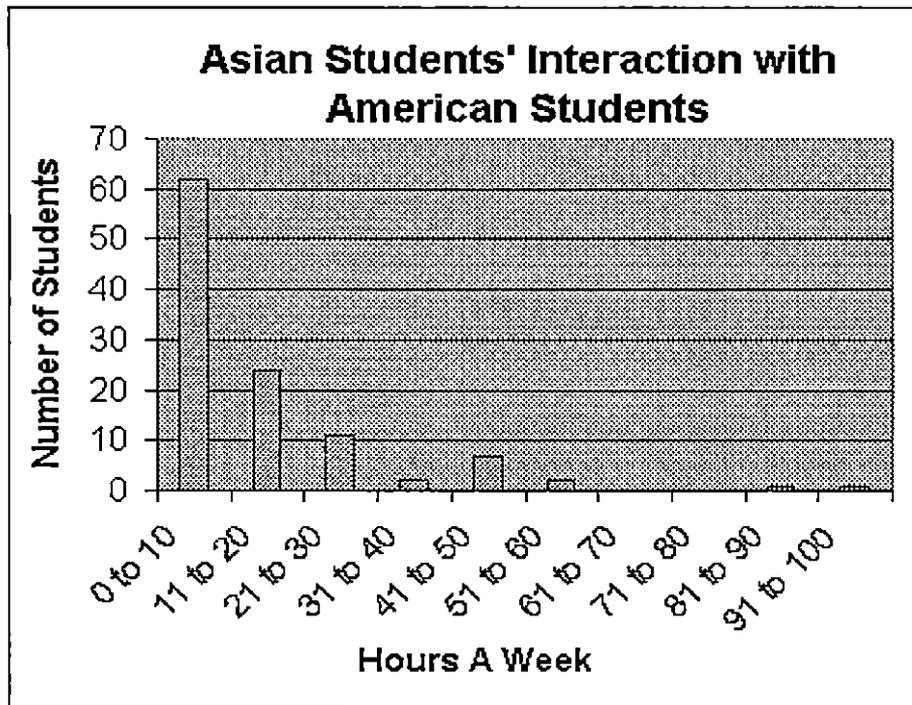
### **Intercultural communication and English competency**

This section describes how much interaction Asian students have with American students in their daily lives and how much confidence they have in their English ability. The results will be analyzed with the goal of determining if there is any relationship between the amount of their interaction and their English ability.

In question 7, “How many hours per week, on average, do you interact with American students?” the results showed that Asian students at MSU had limited interaction with American students; the average was only 15.3 hours per week. The average Asian student’s interaction with American students was about 2 hours a day, including class time (See Table 5). In question 8, the average proportion of their private time Asian students spent interacting with American students was 35 percent. They seemed to spend most of their free time with other students from the same nationalities or at least other Asian students (See Table 6). In question 9, participants

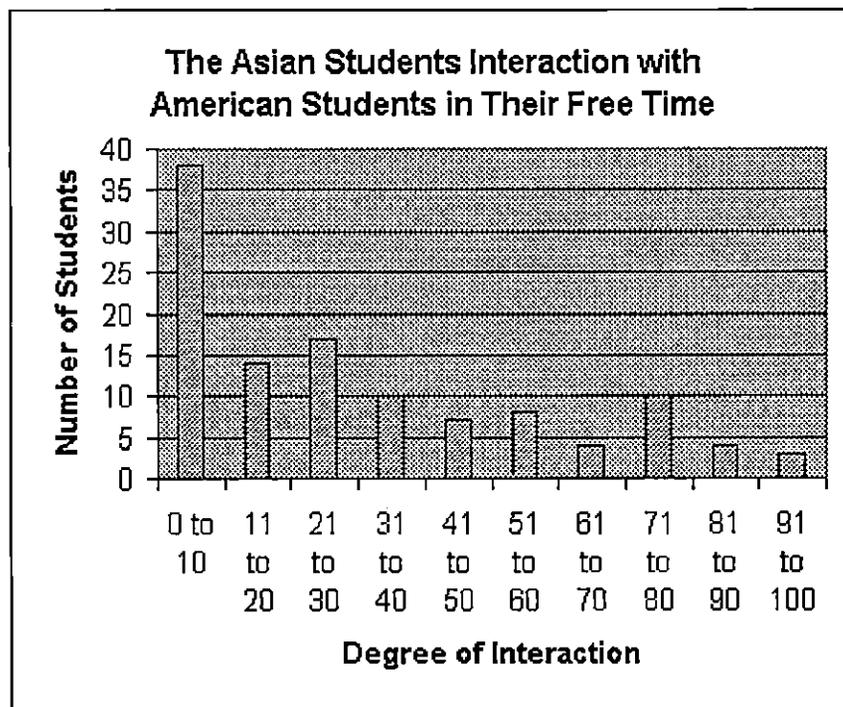
**Table 5 Asian Students Interaction with American Students in A Week**

Hours/week	Number of Students
0 to 10	62
11 to 20	24
21 to 30	11
31 to 40	2
41 to 50	7
51 to 60	2
61 to 70	0
71 to 80	0
81 to 90	1
91 to 100	1
Total	110



**Table 6 Asian Students' Interaction with American Students in Their Free Time**

Interaction in Their Free Time (%)	Number of Students
0 to 10%	38
11 to 20%	14
21 to 30%	17
31 to 40%	10
41 to 50%	7
51 to 60%	8
61 to 70%	4
71 to 80%	10
81 to 90%	4
91 to 100%	3



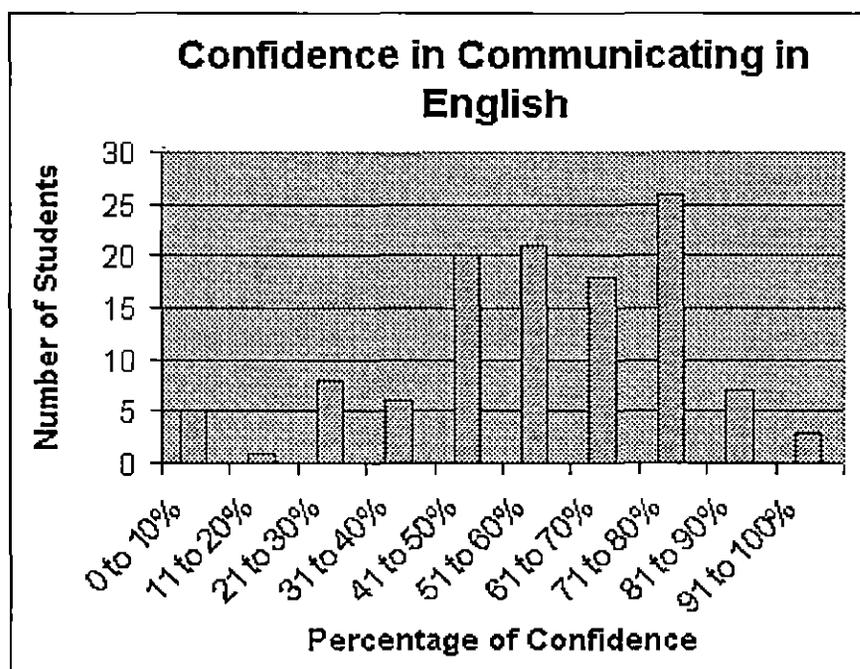
were asked to indicate their confidence in their English ability on a scale between 0 and 100 percent. In their self-reports, the average confidence level was 60.7 percent (See Table 7).

As for the relationship between the degree of Asian students' interaction with American students and the confidence in their English ability, the results showed the more confidence they had, the more interaction occurred. For the Asian students who reported confidence in their English ability between 0 to 30 %, the average of their interaction with American students in their free time was 15.4 %. No one reported in question 8 that they interacted more than 50 % of their free time. On the other hand, for the Asian students who reported 70 % or more confidence in their English ability, the average of their interaction with American students in their free time was 41.2 %, and over a third of the students in this category interacted with American students during more than 50 % of their free time. This points to a strong correlation between self-reported confidence in English ability and Asian students' interaction with American students (See Table 8).

Table 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 describe differences in the degree of Asian students' interaction with American students and confidence in their English ability according to various demographic factors. In analyzing gender differences, the overall average percentage of Asian students' interaction with American students in their free time was 33.7 in male students and 35.1 in female students. In the reported degree of confidence in their English ability, the average was 61.0 % in male students and 60.1 in female students. While male students claim to have more confidence in

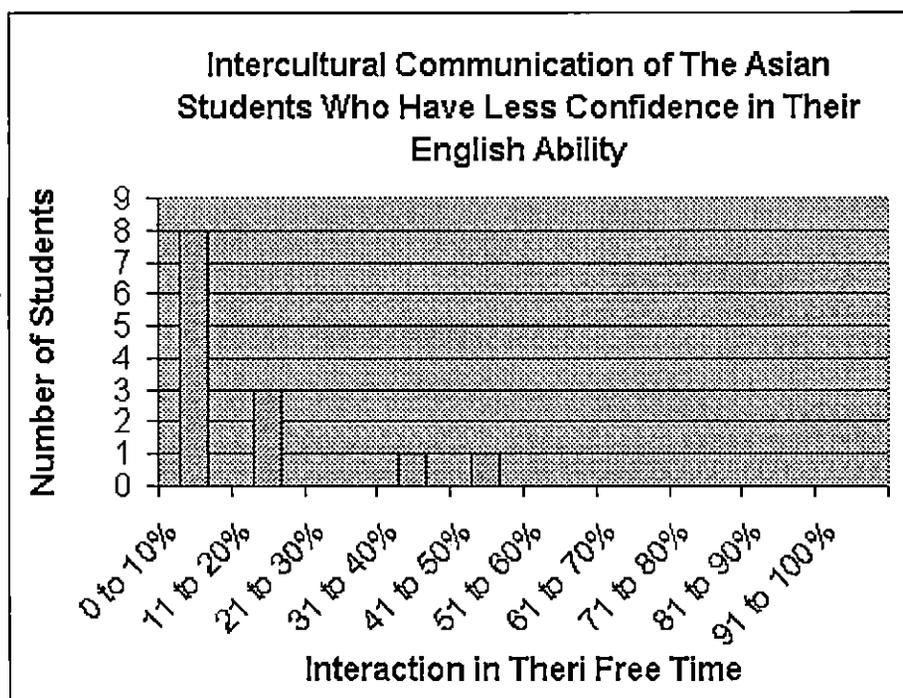
**Table 7 Asian Students' Confidence in Their English Competency**

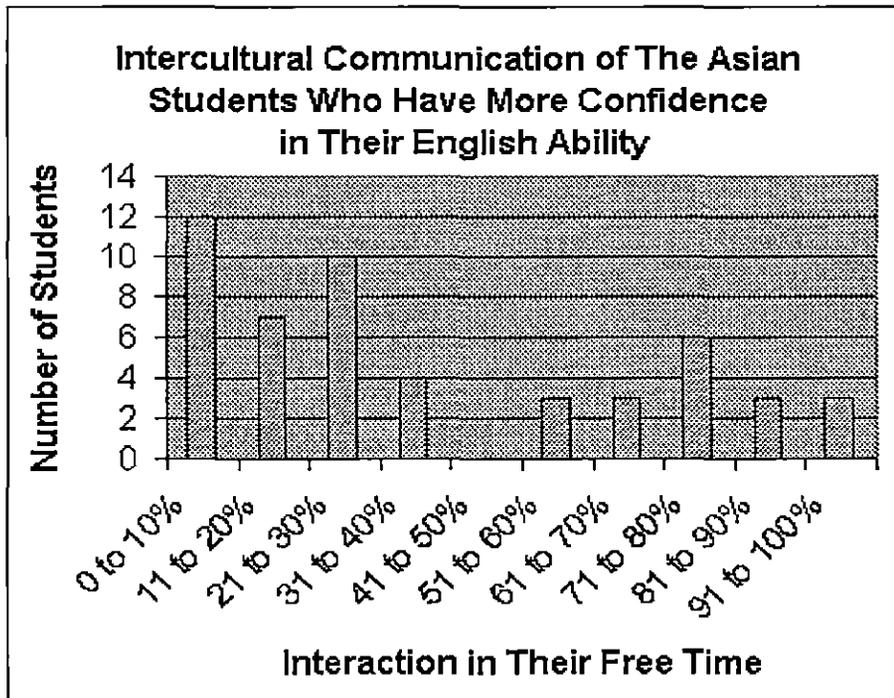
Degree of Confidence	Number of Students
0 to 10%	5
11 to 20%	1
21 to 30%	8
31 to 40%	6
41 to 50%	20
51 to 60%	21
61 to 70%	18
71 to 80%	26
81 to 90%	7
91 to 100%	3



**Table 8      The Relationship between Interaction and The English Competency**

Interaction in Their Free Time (%)	Number of Students	
	Confidence 0 to 30 %	Confidence 70 to 100 %
0 to 10 %	8	12
11 to 20 %	3	7
21 to 30 %		10
31 to 40 %	1	4
41 to 50 %	1	
51 to 60 %		3
61 to 70 %		3
71 to 80 %		6
81 to 90 %		3
91 to 100 %		3
Average Interaction	15.40%	41.20%





their English ability than female students, they interact slightly less with American students in their free time. However, the data did not show any difference by gender (See Table 9).

In the differences by nationalities, Japanese students reported that they interacted more with American students in their free time than other Asian students; the average was 37.8 % for the Japanese students. On the other hand, the average for Korean students was 28.3 %, the least interaction reported among Asian students. Students from Mainland China reported high confidence in their English ability (67.5 %), but the degree of their interaction with American students was comparatively low; the average was 32.7 % (See Table 10).

Compared to other majors, the results showed that Asian students majoring in Communication (graduate course) and MBA had significantly less interaction with American students in their free time; the average for Communication major students was 29.3 %, for MBA students it was 28.2 %, and for students in other majors it was 37.8 % (See Table 11).

Moreover, the results indicated that undergraduate students had slightly more interaction with American students in their free time than graduate students. The average was 21.4 % for ELC program students, 37.9 for undergraduate students, and 34.5 for graduate students. As for the degree of confidence in their English ability, there were no differences between undergraduate and graduate students if the ELC students are separated from the samples. The average was 42.9 % in ELC program students, 61.7 in undergraduate students, and 61.9 in graduate students (Table 12).

**Table 9**                    **Differences of Interaction and English Competency**  
**by Gender**

**Interaction in Their Free Time**

	Male	Female
0 to 10 %	13	25
11 to 20 %	5	9
21 to 30 %	5	12
31 to 40 %	3	7
41 to 50 %	4	3
51 to 60 %	2	6
61 to 70 %		4
71 to 80 %	5	5
81 to 90 %		4
91 to 100 %	1	2
Average	33.7	35.1

**Confidence in Their English Ability**

	Male	Female
0 to 10 %	2	3
11 to 20 %		1
21 to 30 %	4	4
31 to 40 %	1	5
41 to 50 %	7	13
51 to 60 %	6	15
61 to 70 %	5	13
71 to 80 %	11	15
81 to 90 %		7
91 to 100 %	2	1
Average	61	60.1

**Table 10 Differences of Interaction and English Competency  
by Nationalities**

	Interaction Per Week (hours)	Interaction in Their Free Time (%)	Confidence in Their English Ability (%)
China	16.1	32.7	67.5
Japan	23.6	37.8	56.1
Korea	10.3	28.3	57.2
Taiwan	14	33.9	59.7
Total Average	15.3	35	60.7

**Table 11 Differences of Interaction and English Competency  
by Majors**

	Interaction in Their Free Time (%)	Confidence in Their English Ability (%)
Communication (graduate students)	29.3	61.5
MBA	28.2	61.3
Other Majors	37.8	60.1
Total Average	35	60.7

**Table 12 Differences of Interaction and English Competency by Classification**

**Interaction in Their Free Time**

	ELC	Undergraduate	Graduate
0 to 10 %	3	10	26
11 to 20 %	2	3	8
21 to 30 %	1	3	13
31 to 40 %		3	7
41 to 50 %		4	3
51 to 60 %	1	2	5
61 to 70 %		2	2
71 to 80 %		5	5
81 to 90 %			4
91 to 100 %			3
Average	21.4	37.9	34.5

**Confidence in Their English Ability**

	ELC	Undergraduate	Graduate
0 to 10 %		2	3
11 to 20 %			1
21 to 30 %	3	2	3
31 to 40 %	1	1	4
41 to 50 %	1	5	14
51 to 60 %	2	5	14
61 to 70 %		6	12
71 to 80 %		10	16
81 to 90 %			7
91 to 100 %		1	2
Average	42.9	61.7	61.9

There was also a relationship between the length of time staying in the U.S. and the degree of interaction. For Asian students who have been staying in the U.S. for 2 years or less, the average of their interaction with American students in their free time was around 30 %. However, the average was 41.2 % for the students who have been staying in the U.S. from 2 years to 3 years, and 54.3 % for the students who have been staying for more than 3 years. The results also showed that students who have been staying in the U.S. longer had more confidence in their English ability than students who have been staying in the U.S. for a shorter time (See Table 13).

#### **Asian students' interaction and satisfaction**

In the second part, 15 questions were asked in order to study intercultural communication in four different university settings. They are classroom, advisor, social activities held on-campus, and social activities held off-campus. The results for each setting are as follows:

(See Table 14)

##### **(a) Classroom activities**

Questions 1, 2, and 4 were asked about classroom activities. On Question 4, 64 students, or 55.7 % of the total participants, felt that giving their opinions or asking questions in class was helpful to other students. Moreover, in response to Question 2, 70 students, 60.9 % of the total, reported they would like to have a discussion or a group project with American students during class time. In spite

**Table 13      Differences in Interaction and English Competency  
by Length of Time in U.S.A.**

Length of Time/Interaction & Confidence	Interaction in Their Free Time (%)	Confidence in Their English Ability (%)
0 to 1 year	31.2	55.4
More than 1 year to 2 years	29.1	60.3
More than 2 years to 3 years	41.2	62.0
More than 3 years	54.3	68.2
Total Average	35.0	60.7

**Table 14 Asian Students Interaction and Satisfaction toward American Students in University Settings**

	<b>Class Activities</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Q1</b>	I often ask questions or give my ideas during the class.	14	32	36	22	11	115
<b>Q2</b>	I would like to have a discussion or a group project with American students during the class.	7	11	27	49	21	115
<b>Q4</b>	I think giving my opinion or asking questions in the class is helpful to other students.	4	7	40	45	19	115

	<b>Advisor</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Q3</b>	When I have a problem about the class or school life, I go to talk to my advisor.	14	23	25	33	20	115
<b>Q5</b>	My advisor helps me and gives me appropriate suggestions.	10	18	27	33	27	115
<b>Q6</b>	My advisor is willing to help me.	4	10	19	38	41	112

	<b>Social Activities On-campus</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Q7</b>	I would like to have American student(s) as my friend(s).	3	4	14	30	64	115
<b>Q8</b>	I sometimes go out to eat with American students.	19	25	29	20	22	115
<b>Q9</b>	When I have a problem about the assignment, I often times ask my American friends more than other Asian students.	20	29	37	13	16	115
<b>Q10</b>	I would like having American(s) as my roommate(s).	17	10	40	24	24	115
<b>Q11</b>	I would like to participate in a club organized by American students.	6	15	46	32	16	115
<b>Q12</b>	I am doing work-study or graduate assistant.	36	9	12	13	43	113

	<b>Social Activities Off-campus</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Q13</b>	I would like to join a club or activities off-campus.	6	14	42	32	21	115
<b>Q14</b>	I sometimes visit American families and spend time with them.	19	21	30	23	22	115
<b>Q15</b>	I would like to make more American friends off-campus.	4	9	29	37	36	115

of these results, only 33 Asian students, 28.7 % of the total, responded in Question 1 that they in fact often asked questions or presented their ideas in class. These results indicate that Asian students did not interact as often as they would like to with American students in a classroom setting.

(b) Interaction with an advisor

Questions 3, 5, and 6 asked for Asian students' responses about their advisors. In response to Question 3, 53 students, or 46 % of the students, said that they went to talk to their advisors about their problems, but over half of the Asian students responded that they did not often talk to their advisors, or they were not sure. In response to Question 5, 60 students, 52.2 % of the total, indicated they were satisfied with their advisors' advice and help, but 28 students, 24.3 % of the total, did not think the advice was helpful. On Question 6, 79 students, 70.5 % of the total, felt that their advisors were willing to help them, while 33, 29.5 % of the total, were neutral or disagreed. Overall, nearly one quarter of all MSU's Asian students do not talk to their advisors when they have problems, even if they feel their advisors are willing to help and give good advice.

(c) Social activities held on-campus

Questions 7 – 12 were asked to obtain information about social activities on-campus. In response to Question 7, 94 students, 81.7 % of the total, indicated

they would like to have American students as their friends. On the other hand, their answers to the other questions showed that they generally did not socialize often with American students. In response to Question 8, the number of the students who responded that they sometimes went out to eat with American students was 42, 36.5 % of the total; 44 students, or 38.3 % of the total, answered that they did not eat out with American students. Also, only 29 Asian students, 25.2 % of the total, reported that they often asked for American friends' help when they had a problem with an assignment. As for roommates, 48 people, 41.7 % of the total, would like to live with American students, while 27 people, 23.5 % of the total answered they did not want to, and 40 people were not sure. This indicates that even many Asian students who would like to socialize with American students seem to feel it would be difficult to have an American roommate. As for the question as to whether they would like to participate in a club organized by American students, 48 Asian students, 41.7 % of the total, responded that they would like to participate in those organizations, but 46 students, 40 % of the total, answered they were not sure. Question 12 had a problem with the answers. Respondents were confused, since the answer choices should have been yes or no, but they were given the same range of numerical answers as for the other questions. Nevertheless, the results as given seem to indicate that approximately half of the respondents interacted with Americans as a work-study or a graduate assistant.

(d) Social activities held off-campus

Questions 13-15 were asked about activities off-campus. Fifty-three students, 46 % of the total, reported on Question 13 that they would like to join a club or activities off-campus, and 42 students, 36.5 % of the total, were not sure. While 45 students, 39.1 % of the total, sometimes visited American families and spent time with them, 40 students, 34.8 % of the total, reported that they did not. In response to Question 15, 73 students reported that they would like to have American friends off-campus; this was 63 % of the total number. The result showed that many Asian students would like to have American friends off-campus; however, only 39 % of the students said they actually socialize with Americans off-campus very often.

In response to the last question, "How do you think you could improve communication with American students?," some students reported that their English communication skills were a significant barrier. At the same time, most Asian students believe that American students will understand them if they express themselves positively or explain to American students that their English is not good enough. Many of their answers were expressions of positive thinking such as "Keep an open-mind," "Don't be shy," "Don't be afraid," "Don't feel embarrassed," and "Talk to Americans." Others also responded that "Learning American culture" or "Introducing and explaining Asian culture to American students" is important to increase intercultural communication. Moreover, they reported ways to spend more

time with American students, such as, “Join an organization or an activity by Americans,” “Live with Americans,” “Get a job,” “Have a party with Americans,” “Go to church,” or “Date an American.”

While most Asian students reported that they should have a positive attitude about talking to Americans, some students reported that improving communication with American students would be difficult without American students’ cooperation. They believe that, to improve intercultural communication, not only the Asian students but also the American students need to feel that they would like to interact with each other. Their opinions were as follows:

- American students have to accept Asian students first.

(These were the exact words of one Asian student. As an Asian student myself, I think the student probably meant that American students need to be willing to make friends with Asian students and act in appropriate way to convey this attitude.)

- American students should be open-minded and patient with Asian students.
- American students should know Asian culture more.
- It is necessary for both American and Asian students to want to make friends with each other.
- Both American and Asian students need to change their attitudes in order to improve communication.

In conclusion, Asian students at MSU feel the necessity of English communication skills to improve intercultural communication between them and

American students. They think that Asian students should open their minds and talk to Americans. In addition, American students need to try to understand Asian culture and want to interact with Asian students. In the next chapter, Asian students' problems in interacting with American students and some possible solutions will be discussed in detail.

## Chapter 4

### Discussion

This study indicated that the more confidence Asian students had in their English language skills, the more intercultural communication occurred. This result coincided with the results of previous studies. In differences between female and male international students' self-reported comfort in interacting on-campus, a previous study indicated there were no significant differences (Manese, 1988). In MSU's Asian students, the results showed no differences. Male Asian students reported more confidence in their English ability than female Asian students while the degree of male students' interaction with American students was less than female students. At MSU, female Asian students seem to feel more comfortable in their interaction with American students than male students.

Among different Asian nationalities, Korean students reported the least degree of interactions with American students in their free time. On the other hand, the results showed Japanese students to have the highest degree of interaction with American students. In spite of a relatively high degree of confidence, Chinese students do not often interact with American students. Some Chinese students who reported confidence in their English ability over 80 % responded that they interacted with Americans less than 30 % of their free time. This result is different from previous studies (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). One plausible reason for the low interaction reported was that some of these students were in the MBA program, and

their classes were all online courses. For them, it would be difficult to make American friends, since they have no in-class interaction with American students, and they have less interaction with American students even in their free time. Some Taiwanese students who are in the MBA program also reported the same results. The availability of on-line courses is a relatively new phenomenon and thus may not have been a factor in previous studies.

In regard to majors, graduate students who are majoring in communication also reported less interaction with American students in their free time. Among participants, the graduate students in the Communication department were all Taiwanese. In their classes, the number of Taiwanese students is greater than that of American students, so for them, they have less chance and less need to interact with American students, compared to other students in classes with a higher ratio of Americans. Even outside of class hours, it is easier for them to discuss assignments with students who are from the same nationality because they can discuss issues with each other in their own language. As these results indicate, the Asian students who have more interaction with American students during class hours are also more likely to interact with American students in their free time. Thus, as the number of students who are the same nationality increase in a class, their interaction with American students decreases.

A similar situation existed with the ELC program students. Except for one regular class, they spend most of their time with other Asian students. The ELC classroom is isolated from the regular class buildings, so they do not have much of a

chance to interact with American students. Also, the degree of confidence in their English competency was low; the average for the ELC students was 45 %, although the overall Asian students' average was 60.7 %. ELC students may feel awkward talking to American students due to their low confidence in their English ability. Because the majority of students who are majoring in MBA, Communication graduate courses, and in the ELC program are Taiwanese students, it could explain the low average interaction of Taiwanese students.

In the differences between undergraduate and graduate students, the results indicated that undergraduate students had more interaction with American students in their free time than graduate students. This may be because many of the graduate students among the participants were majoring in MBA or Communication. Also, the number of graduate students is smaller than the undergraduate students, so the class size is smaller in graduate courses. Graduate students usually have class only a few times a week and take fewer credit hours per semester. Their classmates are generally the same members in every class, so they have less opportunities to interact with many American students in their classes compared to undergraduate students. Another factor could be that many American graduate students are already working, so they do not remain on campus outside of class time. There is thus no opportunity for the Asian graduate students to interact outside of classes with those American classmates who work.

Also, in this study, as Asian students had stayed in the U.S. longer, the average degree of confidence in their English ability and interaction with American

students in their free time increased. Especially, after two years in the U.S., Asian students seem to feel comfortable about their English competency and the interaction with Americans. These results were different from previous studies (Zimmermann, 1995).

Heikinheimo (1986) indicated not only language problems but also personal difficulties as a reason for international students' dissatisfaction. In the present research, personal difficulties were not studied. However, some Asian students responded to the final, open-ended question, that Asian students should not be afraid of talking to American students. This might indicate an awareness of not only language barriers, but also their personal difficulties. In fact, compared to American students, Asian students tend to be shy. This trait results from their cultural values; although they may be well aware that this presents problems for communication, it requires considerable effort and often courage on their part to forcibly break these long-standing personal habits.

In classroom activities, Asian students do not speak out often. The biggest reason for this may be their perceived poor English competency. However, another possible explanation is that Asian students are not used to speaking in the classroom because of their cultural background. In their home countries, classes are usually lecture style, and students are not allowed to speak during the class. Thus, they do not have chances to have a discussion or a group project with other students. In spite of their cultural background, many Asian students in this research responded that they would like to interact more with American students in a class. Considering the Asian

students' traditional attitudes and classroom habits, American university professors need to be more aware of their situations and attempt to facilitate opportunities in which American and Asian students can exchange their opinions during class time or in out-of-class assignments. If Asian students are told to interact by a professor, it is easier for them to do so, since they will not bear so much personal responsibility for any inconvenience they may cause their American counterparts due to their lack of English proficiency.

Also, advisors need to encourage Asian students to see them regularly and to seek their help whenever needed. The results of this study showed that Asian students felt that advisors were willing to help them, but Asian students were hesitant to consult with advisors about their problems. Cultural traditions in their native countries also provide some explanation to this problem. At home, they do not expect school staff to help them with problems; their families and friends would be relied upon to fill this need. When they are in the U.S., they really need advisors to encourage them and help them to feel comfortable seeking help when needed. Compared to other international students, Asian students may experience more stress, since English is not the principle language in their countries. They may face problems not only about academic courses, but also about financial concerns, roommates, and homesickness. Advisors who counsel international students, especially Asian students, should be more aware of these cultural issues (Oropeza, 1991; Chung, 1998).

In addition to class time, many Asian students feel that they would like to socialize with American students outside of class. However, Asian students do not always know about the events on-campus or off-campus. It is sometimes hard for Asian students to get information. This may be a problem in general with MSU's organizations. There seems to be a haphazard reliance on random flyers posted on bulletin boards to inform students of activities, rather than a standard easily accessible way of finding information. The Trailblazer, the MSU newspaper, would seem to be a natural solution for this problem, but for some reason it is not regularly utilized as means of advertising upcoming meetings and events for campus organizations. The University website shows events on-campus every week, but not many students usually seem to check it. Also, international students are allowed to work only on campus. This is another reason for them to have less knowledge of activities and less interaction with Americans off-campus. Sometimes, local churches invite international students for dinner. This is a good chance for them to meet and talk to people outside their regular circle of friends.

In order to increase intercultural communication between American and Asian students, Asian students will need to overcome the problems of their language barrier and different cultural background. They should not be afraid of talking to American students, and they should try to increase their chances to interact with Americans. For example, living with American students or joining an organization by American students will be helpful for them to make American friends. Some Asian students use the Learning Lab, where a tutor helps with students' problems in academic courses.

It will help them to improve their English language skill. It will also be good for Asian students to have a chance to work with Americans on-campus or off-campus, such as a work-study, graduate assistantship, internship, or volunteer job. It will provide them an opportunity to meet different people and learn communication skills. Through these experiences, they could gain more confidence in communicating with people in English.

Furthermore, as some Asian students indicated in this study, intercultural communication will be difficult if only Asian students try to adjust to American culture. It is also important for American students to learn about and try to understand Asian culture. Many American students do not know about Asian culture, especially in Morehead, since many of MSU's American students come from hometowns in the region around Morehead where there is little chance to meet Asians. Even though more and more Asian students have come to Morehead, American students and Asian students seem to be separated, and they do not have many chances to interact with each other. As a solution for this problem, there are a variety of ways to internationalize the curriculum. According to Barker & Smith (1996), these solutions include integrating or infusing international or global studies into the existing curriculum, adding courses that specifically address international dimensions, and adding global studies or concentrations in area studies. In addition, requiring foreign language training for U.S. students and offering foreign language majors or minors adds to the international dimension. This policy is not as common

today as it was in previous years, according to some older students. This seems strange considering the globalization of the world.

MSU also needs to increase the curriculum so that students can learn about different languages or cultures; there seems to be a significant void in the area of teaching Asian languages or cultures at MSU. One time, Chinese conversation class was offered, and the researcher observed that American students attended that class. It seemed to be hard for American students to pronounce Chinese words, even when they are written in 'pin-yin', which uses the same alphabet as English, because the pronunciation of the vowels and even some of the consonants is completely different from English. However, American students in the class were very enthusiastic to learn pronunciation, new words, grammar, and basic conversation skills. In the Intercultural Communication (SPCH 350) class, students discuss cultural differences or identities during class hours. As an assignment, each student has a partner from a different culture. The partners spend time together and interview each other. They write a report and have a presentation regarding something about the partner or his/her culture. They also ask their partner to cook their own countries' dishes and bring them to the class. They introduce and taste the dishes prepared by each other. They also meet at a Chinese restaurant and learn how to use chopsticks. There is another Intercultural Communication class at the graduate level. In that class, students discuss cultural differences, and each student does research regarding Intercultural Communication. There are some other courses students can learn about cultural diversity and awareness, such as Intro International Study (IST 101),

International Economics (ECON 447), International Finance (FIN 485), and International Marketing (MKT 469). Also, MSU is in the process of developing the new courses in curriculum. In regard to the international or intercultural factors, nine new courses will be offered and six courses will be revised in Fall, 2002. For example, there are issues in International Public Relations (graduate course), Global Studies (HIST 201), and International Management (MNGT 409). These classes provide an opportunity for students to gain a better understanding of and new interests in different cultures. It would be good if more MSU students, especially American students, took these classes. Also, MSU students are required to take the MSU 101 class in their first semester. Professors talk to the freshman about the school system, curriculum, facilities, and all the possible problems in their school life. However, it seems like this is not enough to explain about cultural diversity. Professors need to give detailed information such as the number of international students on-campus, their nationalities, and what attitudes and perspectives students should have to facilitate intercultural communication on-campus.

Another option is a study-abroad program. In a previous study, the researcher studied American students who participated in the China Study Tour (Summer, 2001). Students could participate in this program at a reasonable price. There were two-week, four-week, and six-week programs. Students stayed at a university in China and studied Chinese language and Chinese culture. Students could also get university credit for this trip. Some American students became very interested in Asian culture through this trip, and they interacted more with Asian students upon

their return to the U.S. On the other hand, other students experienced lots of conflicts due to cultural differences which were different from their expectations. They had never traveled abroad or faced communication problems before the China trip, so they seemed to feel stress and anxiety. They should have been given more detailed information about the program and necessary preparation before the trip. The advisor for future trips such as these will need to have a cultural indoctrination session to train students before the trip in order to reduce problems in the foreign country.

In 2002, KIIS (The Kentucky Institute for International Studies) has a Summer program in China. This program lasts six weeks. Students who participate in this program stay at Yunnan Normal University and studying Chinese language and culture. During their stay in China, they will travel around historical places in Hong Kong, Kunming, Xi'an, and Beijing. MSU also will have an exchange program with Kansai Gaidai University in Japan. Students can take various courses in the University and participate in traditional cultural events. Students can stay with Japanese students at a dormitory or stay with a Japanese family. These are very good programs for students to learn Asian culture and languages.

Some Asian students in this study indicated that they needed to introduce or explain their culture to American students in order to improve intercultural communication. MSU's Cosmopolitan Club has some events, such as the International Banquet, which is held in the spring. The international students cook their own countries' dishes and also wear traditional clothing. At the banquet, students from different countries have a performance and introduce their culture. It is

a good chance for American students to taste many delicious foods and learn about Asian and other foreign cultures. However, the people who participate in the banquet are usually faculty, staff, and the Asian students. Most American students do not even know about the banquet. Also, it is usually held on the weekend to avoid a conflict with classes, but since many American students go home on the weekend, they do not come to it. One time, the Asian students cooked their countries' dishes and sold them on campus; many American students and faculty were curious and stopped by. The Cosmopolitan Club welcomes American students to join the club, but most American students do not know much about the club and what they are doing. The Cosmopolitan Club should make a greater effort to provide opportunities for American students to know about the club and join. The committee members of the Cosmopolitan Club have meetings and plan most events for international students. However, there are some communication problems among the various nationalities, and they also do not have a large budget. More support from the University and a focus by the present members on getting more Americans to join in order to enhance the intercultural environment on campus would be beneficial for American and international students alike.

### **Limitation**

This study was conducted only with Asian students at MSU. The sample size was small, so the results are limited to Asian students at MSU. Morehead is a small rural city and thus many of the typical American students who attend MSU do not

have opportunities to interact with people from other cultures in their daily life. Their background might have an effect on the fact that intercultural communication between Asian students and American students at MSU is less than in other areas. There were also problems in the demographics of the sample. As was mentioned in the demographics section, two-thirds of the total number were female and two-thirds of the participants were from Taiwan. Many of the participants were graduate students. As for the majors, many of them were majoring in Communication or Business. Due to these demographic limitations, the data may not be representative of a normal sample of international students. Therefore, the results of this study may not represent typical Asian students' reactions in the typical university settings in the U.S. Another limitation of this study was that some questions included in the questionnaire were not appropriate. Some respondents were confused as to how to answer those questions. Also, the Asian students' English ability was limited, and there may have been some problems for them to understand the literal meaning of questions.

The above limitations could serve as starting points for designing a future study designed to explore the same or similar questions. To provide a more representative sample base, international student populations at various U.S. universities could be analyzed in order to find one that more closely approximates the overall demographics of international students in American universities. In addition, questions could be more carefully designed to insure that international student respondents would understand them sufficiently for their answers to be valid.

Perhaps administering the questionnaire to a sample base of international students representing many countries and academic areas prior to use of the questionnaire in an actual survey would help eliminate ambiguous or weak questions. The initial respondents could be interviewed after taking the survey and their comments and suggestions could be used to change questions as needed and maybe add or delete some questions to provide the desired information for analysis. An analysis of the results from such a pilot study could help the researcher formulate questions with more definitive wording and a range of answers that would result in answers that would be less ambiguous or vague than some of the results from the current study.

## **Conclusion**

The research questions of this study were (1) To what extent are Asian students engaged in intercultural communication with American students and the local community in Morehead? and (2) How satisfied are MSU's Asian students in their interaction with American students and the community?

At MSU, Asian students do not interact with American students often in their usual lives. Also, they do not interact with Americans in the off-campus community. However, Asian students would like to socialize more with Americans. This result indicates that Asian students are not satisfied in their interaction with Americans.

Due to the language barrier, Asian students face difficulties in communicating with Americans. In this study, Asian students who had more confidence in their English ability reported that they had more interaction with Americans in their free

time than students who had less confidence in their English ability. Also, for Asian students who do not interact with American students during classes, it is likely to be difficult to socialize with American students even in their free time. The Asian students who are taking on-line courses reported less interaction than other students. Also, when there are a large number of Asian students who are the same nationality in a class, their interaction with American students decreases.

To improve intercultural communication between American students and Asian students, Asian students will need to overcome the language barrier and open their minds. Furthermore, in Morehead, which is a small rural city, American students do not have opportunities to meet people from other countries and to learn different cultures. Therefore, providing the environment for American students to learn about other cultures or socialize with people of different nationalities will improve intercultural communication.

The presence of a fairly sizeable international student population on MSU's campus provides both challenges and opportunities. Addressing some of the issues discussed in this paper and implementing solutions to some of the problems could gradually increase the interaction between Americans and international students. Such an outcome would be positive for all the affected parties. The international students would better realize their goals of improving English ability and learning about American culture. At the same time, the American students would increase their intercultural communication abilities and their tolerance and understanding of people from other countries. These will be strong assets to enhance their career

opportunities after graduating from Morehead and entering the workforce in today's increasingly globalized world.

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## Appendix A

### Dear Participant:

My name is Maki Kawatani. I am a graduate student majoring in Communication. This survey is executed to study the Asian student interactions with American students in the University settings. If you help me to fill out this questionnaire, I really appreciate it. I want to assure you that your participation is entirely voluntary and safe. You are free to not answer any questions. Your name and answers are confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside the graduate committee. One question you might ask is “Why me.” The best answer is that you represent the population of Asian students at Morehead State University.

If you agree to participate, please complete the questionnaire and return it to me in the self-addressed envelope.

\* Participants must be 18 years or older.

Sincerely,

Maki Kawatani





11. I would like to participate in a club organized by American students. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I am doing work-study (or Graduate Assistant). 1 2 3 4 5
13. I would like to join a club or activities off campus. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I sometimes visit American families and spend time with them. 1 2 3 4 5
15. I would like to make more American friends off campus. 1 2 3 4 5

How do you think improve better communication with American students?

**Thank you very much for your cooperation.**