

This is China:
An Internship For the American Studies Center

A Capstone internship submitted to Southern Utah University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
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*"The road goes on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.
-J.R.R. Tolkien*

I want to first thank my wife, Katie, for her willingness to live in China; had she said "No" the adventure would have been a short one. I'm grateful that she encouraged me to walk down the road of adventure, even though we didn't know where it would take us. A big "thank you" to my chair, Kevin Stein, who unknowingly planted the seed in my mind that China was even an option; Kurt Harris for helping make my pipe dream into an amazing reality; and, of course, Matt Barton for answering my, at times, unending technical questions, as well as granting me tuition help each year.

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I'd also like to acknowledge Kurt, and the Global Engagement Center, for allowing me the opportunity to work as the Program Coordinator for the American Studies Center. That opportunity allowed me to get great first-hand experience representing America in a way that would not have been possible on my own.

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INTRODUCTION

This capstone project is about my experiences at the American Studies Center in the Hunan province of China from August to December of 2013. All my experiences were documented in a personal journal, as well as online via a blog. My goals were threefold: 1. Accomplish the objectives of the American Studies Center (ASC); 2. Document my interactions with the Chinese people; and 3. compare my experiences to the basic concepts of communication accommodation theory.

American Studies Center

Thanks to the hard work and persistence of Dr. Kurt Harris, Southern Utah University became one of ten universities to be awarded a State Department grant to open an American Studies Center in China with a partnering Chinese university. Together, Southern Utah University and Hunan Normal University opened the American Studies Center in the fall of 2013. Its goal—among other things—was to foster understanding of American culture, history, and values by students, faculty, and local community members. Hunan Normal University is located in the city of Changsha (which is comparable in size to Chicago—about 7 million people). The Chinese describe Changsha as a “tier 2” city (Tier 1 being Beijing or Shanghai, and tier 3 being more rural locations). Changsha itself is in south-central China, and is considered a more “political” region.

Getting a toehold into China was a big accomplishment for Southern Utah University, and represented a unique opportunity to form a strong relationship with an emerging international power. As far as goals were concerned, the American Studies Center (ASC) had five primary learning objectives:

i. Competency in U.S. culture, history and institutions; ii. Community service as an American value; iii. English language proficiency; iv. Development of global citizens with an international worldview; v. A desire for life-long learning.

These five objectives were created to accomplish the American mission to build a network of greater understanding of the United States among the Chinese community. Ideally, the ASC was supposed to help deepen this understanding of American cultural diversity, and rich U.S. history amongst the people of Changsha. Additionally, the center provided a means by which SUU and HNU could strengthen the bonds of friendship and learning.

For Southern Utah University, China represents a great opportunity for two-way growth. China is an emerging market for many reasons. It's a target for new students that can come to Cedar City, and enroll in classes at non-resident prices. Additionally, the number of potential students that could come to Cedar City is significant. This potentially means higher revenue that benefits the university for obvious reasons. By opening the ASC, SUU can gain a foothold into a region with a large number of college students. The Hunan province is home to three closely-neighboring universities (Hunan Normal, Hunan, and South Central University), and many provincial schools as well, each with very large enrollments; this means the pool of potential international students that could go to SUU is rich. If the ASC could become a success, it could increase the number of foreign students coming to SUU from China. The Chinese would also benefit by having an American studies center (which few universities in China have), as well benefit from the funding provided by the State Department via a fully-furnished office

complete with new computers, travel expenditures, and more (all of which isn't coming out of their pockets).

Throughout my time in the Master's program my focus had been on integrated marketing campaigns (IMC). Integrated marketing campaigns utilize elements of marketing, public relations, and advertising to make a well-rounded strategy for reaching specific target audiences. My experience in marketing with the University Relations office and Global Engagement Center, and time my spent in Washington D.C., made me uniquely qualified to help run the ASC in Changsha.

For my Masters Capstone, I contacted Dr Stein and Dr. Harris about the possibility of assisting in the creation and implementation of the American Studies Center. Dr. Stein was excited about the possibility, and Dr. Harris welcomed me on as part of the team. Thanks to their approval, I would have the great privilege of acting as Program Coordinator of the ASC from August to December of the 2013 school year. This position was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to run an organization in a foreign country, and create a real-world IMC with international implications. Working with Dr. Stein on the day-to-day issues, while Dr. Harris provided support from America, we were able to overcome the difficulties that come with running an international program in a foreign country. The position also offered me unique experience in my field of study by combining marketing, public relations, foreign diplomacy, and higher learning together into one job.

Prior to leaving for China, the three of us divided the specific roles that we would handle—some in China, and some in America—once the project was underway. Dr. Harris would be the Director of the center with Dr. Stein being Vice-Director. As

Director of the ASC, Dr. Harris would remain at SUU and handle the logistics needed to sustain a program in China. This included obtaining a purchasing card for the ASC, ordering and shipping supplies from America, and providing influence through his title to ensure schedules were kept (titles being very important in Chinese bureaucracy). Dr. Harris also laid out a road map for basic themes and activities to promote each month, providing the foundation I needed to create a marketing campaign. Dr. Stein was to oversee the ASC in China. Given that there had been prior difficulties getting the center to move forward, it was hoped that Dr. Stein's academic status would help remove bureaucratic barriers. Additionally, Dr. Stein would oversee me as I created and implemented our integrated marketing campaign. Together, we were able to handle all the day-to-day operations of the center, and were able to strengthen the relationship between these two great institutions.

During the three and a half months I was in China, I had two professional roles to play: employee and researcher. Both tasks proved difficult in different ways, but both were also greatly rewarding. As the program coordinator for the ASC, my roles were numerous and changed periodically depending on the needs of the center. Marketing, event planning, promotions, public relations, and community outreach were all combined into one mass project. Adaptability was the key to my success or failure due to the constantly evolving nature of our relationship with HNU. The whole adventure was filled with complications, cultural misunderstandings, and many frustrations. In the end, however, we were able to accomplish our goals, and I learned a great deal along the way.

The other proverbial hat I wore was that of a researcher. I wanted to know how the Chinese would adjust their conversational skills to talk with me as an American. I was curious to see how they might accommodate to me conversationally, and how I would accommodate them in social settings. Little is known about the Chinese people in America, thus I wasn't sure if my existence in their world would make me a celebrity or outcast.

As An Employee

As I stated before, I was the Program Coordinator for the American Studies Center, and I was given a fair amount of leeway to create a campaign that would engage the Chinese community. This responsibility gave me the chance to utilize the skills I had learned throughout my time in the master's program. I hoped my efforts would translate into a meaningful impact on the Chinese perspective of the United States and Southern Utah University. My only limitations would be what we could afford, and what our Chinese counterparts at HNU would approve.

My biggest nemesis was bureaucracy, and a time limit. Bureaucracy was a nightmare in China. Everything needed to be approved by committee. We came to learn that the Chinese make all their business decisions by committee. That meant that even the smallest decisions would often have three or more people deciding the consequences of any particular choice. While this concept may seem prudent, it results in endless bureaucracy as people are in constant disagreement. Scheduling was also a nightmare. Meetings that were scheduled for a Thursday would change to two weeks from Thursday, and once that meeting arrived, the time would again change indiscriminately, so that a meeting at 5 p.m. might move to 3 p.m., and all of this would have been

decided at 2:55 p.m. Trying to adapt to the wants of the Chinese was difficult because, at times, they did not even know what they wanted, and when they did, often that would change an hour later too.

While this aspect certainly proved frustrating at times, it was a great opportunity to learn how to adapt to fluid situations, and how to respond in a way that would yield the best results. My only regret was that this bureaucracy delayed the actual ASC events longer than we would have liked, but we dealt with it by making our activities fit the limitations we were dealt. After a few weeks, and as limitations eased, we were able to get more accomplished. Much of the actual day-to-day negotiating was done by Dr. Stein, and over time his relationship with our Chinese counterparts helped get things done. Every day was filled with thoughts on how we could be most effective with the limited freedom the Chinese would give us. We were limited by when and where we could have activities. At times we were even told who could and could not participate. The Chinese envisioned the ASC being a form of exclusive club that only select students could join. At other times, the HNU administrators didn't like how we might spend our own money, and would choose not to approve activities if they deemed them unworthy.

Early ASC operations deviated from the original plans we had created due to the negotiation process taking longer than expected. Because the ASC was funded by the Department of State, we had specific requirements that had to be accomplished in order to get our funding—these requirements included things like securing a space for the office, and having a grand opening. Since neither of these things had happened, we couldn't finance any projects. Additionally, the Chinese refused to allow us to do official activities until they gave us approval to even exist. Until we got approval, we wouldn't

have an official space, and we wouldn't be able to complete our original plans laid out by Dr. Harris. This meant that much of my time was initially spent tutoring English, answering questions about America, and playing basketball with the local community. These daily activities proved to be a great way to engage with the locals, but also ensured that we didn't do anything that might jeopardize our relationship with HNU.

As time rolled on, my day-to-day responsibilities began to change. Dr. Stein and I were able to negotiate with our Chinese counterparts from Hunan Normal University, and we finally secured an office in mid-October. After a solid two months of negotiations and periodic setbacks, the office was ours, and the keys were in my hand. Getting this office furnished, on the other hand, would take another month and a half.

Once one problem would be solved, another would appear. After we finally got our office, we received Dr. Stein's SUU purchasing card. However, once we tried to use this purchasing card, we quickly realized that it wouldn't work with Chinese systems. It was anticlimactic to say the least: after nearly two months of negotiations we had our funding, but didn't have a means to use it. Problems like this occurred every week, and while one or two concerns would be easy to overcome, these issues were happening with alarming regularity.

Frequent roadblocks were not the end of the world, and we wouldn't allow ourselves to be discouraged. We were at least given the "green light" to enact our plans. The only problem was half the things we had planned to do could no longer be accomplished. Certain activities were made to be held in the summer, others couldn't be done without replacing others, and some just couldn't be done once we discovered the realities that China gave us. The activities we could do ranged from teaching baseball

and basketball, to sampling pies for Thanksgiving and screening the film *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*. With each activity, I was required to design posters and digital promotions to get students talking and interested in the ASC ¹.

It was particularly gratifying to see attendance grow with each activity we held. Over time, the friends we made in China really helped us get the word out on our events, and once the students knew that American students were hosting anything, they were eager to participate.

I learned much about myself during this time, as I was often placed out of my comfort zone in order to accomplish the goals we set for ourselves, but it was great for my personal development. Of course, realities of China don't really set in until you arrive, and it's only then that complications you had never even considered dangle themselves blatantly in your face. It is often difficult enough to get an American student to be engaged in a conversation, but getting a shy Chinese student whose English isn't the best to want to come out of his/her comfort zone can be like herding cats. Getting community and student participation was my job, however, and I needed to foster discourse. And what I found is that they're similar to Americans culturally, in that no two people are exactly alike. Some students would come right up to me and talk my ear off, while others would only give tepid glances that were so quick I wasn't sure if they were actually looking at me. Then again, there were also those who wouldn't talk to me, but had no problem staring at me for a solid five minutes, all while keeping their expressionless face fixated upon me.

¹ See appendix A for graphics of various ASC activities

My integrated marketing plan changed multiple times because of time constraints, bureaucracy, and just plain being told “no” by our Chinese counterparts at Hunan Normal University. In the end, however, my plans consisted of three tiers of engagement. Once a month we would hold a “tier 1” activity. This form of activity would ideally include a lecture on American culture, a game, and a movie. One such example would be our Thanksgiving events. Thanksgiving included playing a modified version of “The Turkey Bowl,” having a lecture about the history and modern culture of Thanksgiving (complete with a PowerPoint presentation and sampling of Marie Calendar pies), and watching a movie about the holiday. “Tier 2” activities would be important enough to utilize promotion of some kind—such as Facebook, weChat or QQ announcements (Chinese version of Facebook)—but not include a lecture. This type of activity would be like teaching baseball or basketball. Tier 2 events would also try to tie into whatever the tier 1 event of the month would be. Finally, “tier 3” activities were those that would form the foundation of our monthly activities. This included things like English tutoring, office hours that were open to the public (once the office finally opened), and a bi-weekly event called English Corner. English Corner was the bread and butter of the ASC for the first six weeks because we weren’t allowed to do much else. This activity was held every Monday and Thursday, and it was an opportunity to talk to local students and community members in English about various topics.

Overall this three tier system was how I planned things out, or I should say, how things were “supposed” to go. Naturally, there were hiccups everywhere, one example was our baseball event. I had searched high and low to find anything that could be used as a baseball in China, and finally I found something. The ball was designed like a

baseball on the outside, though the inside was much softer, but I couldn't find a good substitute for a bat anywhere. Finally, I settled on a PVC pipe I bought for under a dollar that was the perfect length for a bat. Minutes before the event was to begin, I had Dr. Stein try it out; on the first swing the pipe burst into pieces. We panicked until we found a branch off a tree to replace our fake bat. All was well in the end, but this is how every day seemed to go. Things would be great until they weren't.

As a Researcher

From a research standpoint, China was fascinating from beginning to end. There was no end to the amount of communication between cultures that I could document. These interactions, the ways we would accommodate one another to promote understanding and comprehension are what I was looking to observe. Sometimes there was so much about Chinese culture and China in general, that I could write a dozen other papers just on my experiences in such a foreign place. My primary mode of documenting each day was a journal I kept with me at all times. Whether I was in class or at lunch, I would always keep it handy to jot down anything I might find interesting.

Prior to arriving in China, I had a project in place, and a basic plan for documentation, but I did not know how effective my planning would be. I knew that my interactions with these people would be unique and life changing, but in what way, I wasn't sure. It's incredibly difficult to describe what living in such a foreign land was like, but to give a small insight into how it began, I will say that someone died on our flight to China. I'll mention more about this later, but for now know that it was an experience worth documenting.

Literature Review

Before I discuss the experiences I had in China, it is important to explain Communication Accommodation Theory and my decision to use it as my preferred method of evaluation. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is meant to provide a wide-ranging framework which attempts to predict and explain the adjustments people make to create, maintain, or decrease social distance in interaction (Giles & Ogay, 1973). Essentially, CAT seeks to discover the different ways in which people accommodate their communication for others, their motivations for doing so, and the consequences. Additionally, CAT looks at both individual and group interactions to determine when our personal identities overpower our group identity and vice versa.

There are many different facets to CAT, but one particularly important element to consider is the intercultural and bilingual interactions between two completely different cultures—in this case American and Chinese. CAT considers the importance of the participants of a conversation, but also looks at the socio-historical context in which the interaction is embedded (Giles & Ogay, 2007; Heffernan, 2008). CAT has many different facets, but since my project's goal was to focus on my work experience primarily—with research being secondary—I decided to focus the research aspect on the concepts of convergence and divergence.

CAT suggests individuals use communication to indicate their feelings towards one another, as well as to serve as a gauge to measure the amount of social distance between both parties. This ebb and flow in conversation and behavior is called accommodation (Giles & Ogay, 2007). This is where convergence and divergence come

into play. Convergence is a strategy in which the participant of a conversation elects to adapt his/her communication behaviors to the opposite person or group with which this person is engaged for the purpose of alleviating social differences in communication. Thus, a person will attempt to imitate or reciprocate another group or person's mannerisms—both verbal and nonverbal—for the sake of accommodation. In other words, convergence is all about trying to “fit in.” Conversely, divergence is a strategy that seeks to accentuate the linguistic and non-verbal differences between the two parties to illustrate a clear difference with the intent of aiding accommodation by emphasizing cultural differences (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). This type of accommodation can be effective when the other party expects cultural differences to occur.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was created by social psychologists in the 1970's as a means to explain and explore linguistic and cultural differences between people in both pluralistic and singular interaction (Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1972). CAT truly is a theory of both inter-group and interpersonal communication and seeks to predict and understand intergroup communication (Gallois & Giles, 1998). Interactions between cultures provide the best context for understanding this theory.

As mentioned earlier, one of the primary aspects of CAT is the study of convergence and divergence in communication. The correlating notion of Social Identity Theory (SIT)--which states that people adjust their personalities in order to make themselves more likable in a group setting (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)--is used to form the foundation of explanation as to the motives of divergence and convergence in social

interactions. These instances can include things such as a speaker's need for social approval or the need to reinforce social identity.

CAT also borrowed basic theoretical ideas from attribution theory (Heider, 1958), which deal with accommodative strategies. Attribution theory helped formulate theories to explain how information received and perceived manipulates behavior. CAT uses attribution theory to describe how we evaluate a person who performed a desired behavior and whether that behavior indicates an internal or external cause.

Recently, studies have been conducted that look specifically at Chinese interactions with Westerners (Cui et al., 2010; Li, 2006). These studies looked for adaptive speech patterns that reaffirm the theories put forward by communication accommodation. Initially, the 2006 study looked to see what backchannel tactics intercultural college students would use in interacting with one another. Li had Canadian and Chinese students engage in pre-planned conversations and looked for convergent and divergent strategies that the students would use (Li, 2006). Li described backchannel responses as words like "uhm, right, yes, ok, etc." After the conversation, the students involved would take a manipulation test and rate how they thought their experience went and to see how much of the conversation they could recall. What he found was that the Chinese students would decrease the amount of backchannel responses when having a conversation with the Canadian students; conversely the Canadians' would increase the amount of backchannel responses when talking with the Chinese (Li, 2006).

The students were asked to role play a physician/patient scenario in which the two students could hold a mock conversation. Additionally, the study had 3 separate

conditions: Canadian: Canadian, Chinese: Chinese, and Canadian: Chinese, to evaluate how the interactions differed between cultures (Li,2006). One particularly revealing finding was that the Canadians' increase in backchannel responses did not actually improve the recall ratings for the Chinese. The study seemed to suggest that the two cultures' attempts to accommodate actually hurt comprehension (Li, 2006). To test this notion further, the 2010 study (Cui, et al.) looked to see if frequent backchannel responses could be misleading signals in intercultural communication. To do this, the study recruited 80 college students with either a Chinese background or Canadian background—which was double the size of the 2006 study (Cui et al.,2010). The 80 students were evenly split between gender and nationality with 40 Canadian men and women and 40 Chinese men and women. Their experiment paralleled the 2006 study by having one-on-one conversations between Chinese and Canadian students.

They found that when the Chinese talked to other Chinese, backchannel responses were at their highest, followed by Chinese/Canadian then Canadian/Canadian (Cui et al.,2010). They also found in duplicating the tests that often the Chinese were not willing to use the backchannel response of "repeat" as often with Canadians as they would with other Chinese students. The study suggested that perhaps the Chinese students were uncomfortable asking the Canadians to repeat what they had just said. The study also suggests that both parties participated in "code switching," or in other words, they did change their speech patterns to adapt to the other culture in conversation, thus providing some evidence to the validity of CAT (Cui et al.,2010).

These two research studies provide a good analysis of interactions between Western culture and Chinese culture; however, there are some things that still must be

considered. These research studies were quantitative in nature and looked for specific criteria to code. Additionally, the basic outline of each student's interaction was already scripted, which means the conversations were not entirely spontaneous. The Chinese and Canadian students knew they were both being analyzed and studied, and this knowledge may have altered true interactions. This means that my study will have the potential for observing a more genuine interaction between two cultures. Beyond the difference between qualitative and quantitative studies, my study will also be in China, whereas the 2006 and 2010 study were both held in Canada. Being in a foreign country may have affected the Chinese students' conversations due to the discomfort of being outside their homeland. My project in China will not have defined moments where students know that a study is going on, and therefore there will be no need for pretenses or false personas. And, my hope is that as relationships develop our interactions will not be anything less than authentic. This should hopefully create the best atmosphere possible to really look at how participant observation works.

By the very nature of the ASC itself, numerous opportunities presented themselves for me to observe hundreds of students and many dozens of different interactions which—over time—were sufficient to compile a large source of data that I used to see what, if any, overarching consistencies in communication between the center and the Chinese students themselves appeared. It was noteworthy to see how divergence and convergence presented themselves in communication where a common language was not well known by either party. At times, it seemed that nonverbal communication may have had a greater role in discerning convergence or divergence in intercultural dialogue because language deficiencies required that each party read body language to

understand meaning rather than actual words, which were sometimes difficult to comprehend.

One criticism of CAT that must be taken into account is the seemingly subjective nature of communication. This means that there is the potential, in individual and group communication, that the interacting parties may interpret a convergent strategy as being divergent and vice versa. One study addressed these issues (Thakerar et al., 1982). The study observed speech between rich and poor social classes and found that both groups adjusted their speech to the other, but that in some conversations where participants thought they were converging, they were actually diverging (Thakerar et al., 1982). This study led to an amendment of one of CAT's original propositions, stating that one does not converge toward or diverge from the actual speech of the recipient, but toward or from one's stereotypes about the recipient's speech, meaning there may be times when groups adjust to what they think the other side wants because of previously held beliefs or ideas about the other party.

This basic illustration of convergence and divergence strategies, as well as potential pitfalls within CAT, is an essential foundation to prepare the way for my plans and goals for China. Utilizing this theory—and more specifically the aspects of accommodation, these were my research questions:

RQ1-When engaging in one-on-one, and group setting conversations with Chinese students while representing the ASC, will Chinese students favor convergence or divergence accommodations?

RQ2-When considering CAT, will Chinese students' overall communication style coincide with traditional communist beliefs, thus resulting in divergence, OR will Chinese interest in a new future for their country lead them to convergence with the ideals that the ASC will stand for (with acknowledgement that the ASC doesn't have an agenda, but rather the stereotypes that may arise given the association with the U.S. government)?

RQ3-How will CAT strategies change, if at all, in interpersonal and group interactions from our arrival to our departure? Will development of my relationship with them influence accommodation, or will time itself affect these interactions?

The whole point of crafting my research questions prior to going to China was to get me thinking about interaction and interpersonal communication. As my time in China progressed, the first and third research questions were what guided my journal entries. The second question was thrown out because the communist party wasn't nearly as influential in the day-to-day lives of those I interacted with, as I would have thought. It was there in various advertisements around town, but it wasn't significant enough to influence communication.

Because my research questions deal with real people and actual lives, the answers cannot be a simple yes or no as originally written. Even in a collectivist culture like China, people are still individuals with unique and different points of view. Therefore, I will address these questions generally throughout the rest of my paper rather than having a defined section. These questions influenced the way I gathered data and how I

viewed the interactions I witnessed and was a part of, and these questions will be prominent themes within the content I present.

Method

As stated above, I utilized Communication Accommodation Theory for the research component of my Master's project. Initially, I had proposed that my main source of interactions be students from Hunan Normal University; however, once I actually arrived in China, I realized that this was an unnecessary restriction. The goals of the ASC were to reach out to the community, whether they were students of HNU or not. Therefore, once I actually was settled and living in China, I took any opportunity for conversation with a Chinese person to evaluate their various communication behaviors, and their forms of accommodation to me, whether they were students or not.

Originally, I had only planned on documenting instances in which I found myself actually representing the ASC, but I quickly realized that no matter what I did, I was an ambassador for the center and the United States. Everywhere I went, I was watched like a hawk and evaluated constantly. I knew this because the Chinese would tell me what they thought of me, and how I either fit in or was different from their perception of Americans. With this in mind, I decided that by the very nature of my being white, I was automatically assumed to be American, and therefore all my conversations were applicable.

My primary data collecting technique was to journal my experiences. Not every conversation revealed profound insight into intercultural communication, but any time something noteworthy happened, I attempted to write about it that same day. I was careful never to journal in front of anyone because I didn't want their interactions with me to be guarded or scripted. I feared if people knew I was watching the ways they

interacted with me, they might adjust their behaviors to be more in line with whatever they thought I might want.

My observations spanned mid-August to early-December. During this period, my journaling yielded many interactions from a host of different people. More importantly, I was able to befriend a core group of Chinese students that I was able to interact with on a daily basis from beginning to end. This long exposure to their social interactions gave me the ability to compare and contrast the ways our communication evolved from August to December. Additionally, I spoke to many people whom I saw maybe a handful of times; their interactions with me produced different results as well.

After arriving in China, I found a few places that produced interesting social interactions, and I sought them out frequently to gather data. The first place I studied social interaction was at a basketball court that was only one block from my apartment. I found playing a sport with people who spoke very little to no English to be a fascinating avenue when observing CAT. Other locations included eating out with Chinese friends I eventually made and conversations I participated in during English Corner. English Corner was an HNU-sponsored event that happened every Monday and Thursday where Chinese students and community members could come to discuss political and social issues in English. This means of data gathering provided some of the most interesting conversations and examples of communication accommodation.

Auto-ethnography

Because Communication Accommodation Theory is all about interaction, it was only natural that my reporting process parallels the interpersonal nature of conversation. Therefore, it made sense that my experiences should be reported using the

method of auto-ethnography. From a broad perspective, ethnography is a form of research method that allows the researcher to be far more engaged in the research than other methods of gathering data. Given that my research required me to participate in intercultural communication, it seemed only natural that I use ethnography to accomplish my goals.

While ethnography is a form of data gathering, it is also a reporting style. More specifically, an auto-ethnography is a style of reporting that reads like a narrative and encourages the reader to be part of the experience. Auto-ethnography is a form of qualitative research that attempts to be the bridge that connects real-life experience with academic knowledge and research (Tillman, 2009). Auto-ethnography reads similar to a novel because it invites the reader to participate in the journey and experiences of the author. This style of reporting was needed to convey my own personal experiences and how they relate to the data I gathered. To understand the struggles, joys, and complications of intercultural communication, I needed the reader to be there with me, to experience things as I saw, and to guide them through these memories, making sense of everything from an applied research standpoint. Auto-ethnography provides cultural analysis that is deeply rooted in personal experience, and that is exactly why I chose to use it (Goodall, 2004).

This form of research emphasizes attention to context, making connections, and shared social interactions, and is well suited to the study of communicative interpretation (Hunter, 2012). This is essentially what I set out to do in China. It was my goal to interact with the Chinese culture, and to observe how two separate cultures respond to each other.

I must also acknowledge that these experiences represent how I saw them, and how I interpreted their meaning. Anytime I wrote something in my journal pertaining to my interactions with the Chinese people, I wrote the experience as close to how it actually happened as possible. In all my following experiences, I have tried in earnest to remove any personal bias I may have to present a fair view of intercultural communication and the tactics the Chinese, and myself, used to accommodate one another.

Some have argued that auto-ethnography invites too much personal bias into the research. These opponents believe that this form of research may be too focused on the researcher and not focused enough on subject. However, this argument does not stand with my research. While my research may appear to focus on my emotions and reactions to the events that transpired in China, the reality is that my journaling represents the documentation of others' reactions to my presence in their country. This research is their story of interaction with an American. I am simply the common catalyst that evoked communication and intercultural response. My role is that of narrator, not protagonist.

In gathering my data I made certain that my journaling represented events irrespective of my personal emotions. To eliminate bias, I would write down events as they happened and interpret their meaning later on so that my own personal bias could be reduced, and help ensure that my observations remained objective.

My Experience

This is China (TIC)

Sitting on an airplane nervously waiting for an adventure of a lifetime to truly begin, I looked ahead about five rows in front of me to see a crowd of Korean Airline workers gathered around a single passenger. I recognized the woman they had surrounded. Prior to liftoff she had been in a wheelchair and had a mask for oxygen, it was hardly anything that would cause a second glance. After all, she was old, and that's what old people do, they use oxygen. However, on the plane several hours later, she wasn't doing so well. Multiple times the flight attendant came on the line and asked if anyone was a doctor. It was only then that I realized why.

She was having trouble breathing, and then she wasn't breathing at all. Flying over Tokyo, en route to Seoul, Korea, our plane could have landed to get this woman to a hospital; however, our flight kept going. A male flight attendant began giving chest compressions to this woman and would continue to do so for the next two hours. It was all for show, she was dead. As we landed and walked down the aisles to the exit of the plane, I could see her pale body—which had turned a deep shade of yellow—and I couldn't help but wonder just what I was getting my wife and eighteen-month-old daughter into; my Chinese adventure had begun.

It's difficult to put into words how truly different a place like China is, or even how difficult bridging cultures can be. Things that are simple and mundane in America become huge, seemingly insurmountable, obstacles when you can't speak the language. In the whole time leading up to our departure to China, I had only ever worried about getting there. I stressed about making the flight on time and catching connecting flights,

but never once considered all the challenges that would appear once we actually arrived— like getting money from an ATM. It is simple to figure things out in America, where everything is in English, but introduce Chinese characters in an entirely new city, and things change abruptly. And if you get lost, you can't simply google your location on a cell phone, you have to figure it out on your own; oh, and you don't have a cell phone. Then factor in finding a grocery store, and being able to purchase the food you do get, get it all home, and suddenly you can find yourself panicking. Eventually, these types of concerns work themselves out, and within about four days the basics of Maslow's hierarchy of needs are met. This is when the actual challenges begin.

Moving from Cedar City, Utah to any major city in the US can be quite an adjustment. Even within the country there can be culture shock. These things are quadrupled in China. Instead of saying that it is "a whole new world," it should more aptly be described as "a whole new universe." From babies without diapers peeing in the street, to little old grandmas that can spit a loogie that'd make a doctor's stomach turn, the culture is a night and day difference. Trying to adjust to these changes doesn't just happen overnight, no matter how willing you are to assimilate into the culture. China produces some of the strangest daily events that would make any American do a double take. Foreigners have a term for this, It's called "This is China" (TIC). Any time something crazy or atypical happens instead of discussing it at length, you simply say TIC and go on about your day.

That essentially was the approach I had to take to keep myself grounded. I had to embrace the awkward, and just move forward. I have first painted this description of

China so that it can be understood how completely different working, living, and studying in China really is.

The initial beginnings of getting the American Studies Center going were a nightmare. We knew it would be difficult before we arrived, but it was hard to truly understand just how challenging it was really going to be until we got there. What made things even more frustrating was that the roadblocks that appeared each day were self-imposed by our Chinese counterparts at HNU; After going through negotiations their concerns had often been resolved previously only to become issues again.

The thing about Chinese business culture, it's all about face and power. It was fascinating to watch firsthand, but it was infuriating at the same time. The problem with face and power is that they seemed, at times, to run in direct conflict with each other. To show the HNU administrators "power," meetings would be scheduled then cancelled, ideas would be approved then rejected, and activities were a good idea until they weren't. We never really knew when we could trust what we were told. From a communication aspect, it was fascinating to watch it all unfold, but being on the receiving end of this education was off-putting.

Of course these administrators also felt the need to have good face. So they would go above and beyond to ensure that I was comfortable, or had enough to eat or drink. It's an interesting cultural paradox. On the one hand, the Chinese feel the need to be very accommodating to their guests, even if they don't want to say yes, they still want to be accommodating. On the other hand, they also want to show that they're the boss, and compromise could make them appear weak. As I said before, they need to appear powerful, so being "the boss" makes them dictate aggressively more than is necessary.

These two notions seem to directly conflict with one another, and I think, explain the seemingly hot and cold relationship we encountered throughout my time there.

Scheduling was another tremendous nightmare. Advanced planning isn't that important in Chinese culture. If something doesn't need to be done right now, then it won't get done. Often Dr. Stein or I would request to have something done or ordered by a certain time, and if we weren't persistent in asking or reminding, it simply wouldn't get done. This mentality was apparent all over Changsha. One caveat is that once they want something to get done, it moves incredibly fast. The difficulty comes from knowing when you've reached that stage. Typically, it would go from not receiving any contact for a while, to a bombardment of emails and phone calls asking why things weren't done, or why I hadn't responded to the email they sent five minutes ago. Fortunately, as time rolled on, our relationships with our Chinese contacts improved. It became easier to get things done because each party was learning to better accommodate the other.

As a Student

While I was in Changsha working at the center, and doing research, I was also a full time student learning Chinese in "A Ban" (the most basic Chinese course offered) at Hunan Normal University. Each day, from 8am to 12pm, I would practice reading, writing, and speaking Chinese. The course was fast paced and challenging, and I had to try very hard to keep up with the class.

One positive unintended consequence of being in this class was interacting with all the other foreign students. Obviously, since my class was an introductory level Chinese course, there were no Chinese students. There were, however, a wide variety of foreign students from all over the world. Of the twenty-four students in our class, there

were eighteen countries represented. Many cultures of the world were in my class. We had a white South African, a handful of black Africans from the Congo and Kenya, a multitude of Middle Easterners, South Koreans, and several others.

In fact, had I known that my Chinese class would be filled with such diverse people, I would have used my class as a focus of study instead.

There were several striking communication and group social dynamics that played into our class on a daily basis. For instance, the way the class self-segregated was fascinating. Students inherently divided themselves according to their race, language, and region of the world. One excerpt from my journal highlights this self-segregation:

Perhaps even more interesting is the way the class naturally divides itself.

Africans sit together, Middle-Eastern students sit in the back (despite hailing from about four different countries), the “white westerners” (US, S. Africa, Wales) all sit together, and the black Africans hover together in the front. We all just inherently divided ourselves. We are still friendly with everyone in class, but I find it interesting that we’re more comfortable being around people whose background is similar to our own²(J. Sorensen, personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013).

As time went on, everyone became friends with each other, but we never changed our seating (I should note that I did initiate one seating shift the first week of class. I originally sat next to the Pakistani students, but their body odor was so egregious that I had to move to the other side of the classroom). There were a few instances where a student would be the only one from his/her country, and in these circumstances

² See Appendix B Journal entry Sept. 25

students would use different means to divide themselves with the self-made groups of our class.

Our class seems to represent our own world. Those who don't identify by country, will use a secondary identifier in language. In fact, there are always small conversations in four or five languages going on between class.³(J. Sorensen, personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013)

One example of this would be Babi from Russia. Despite not quite aligning perfectly with any one group, he spoke decent English, and since no one else in the class spoke Russian, he self-segregated into our group. Amazingly, everyone in the class spoke basic English. Their comprehension and depth of understanding varied greatly, but anytime the sub groups interacted with each other they always used English. What I found fascinating was that there wasn't a single person in the class that isolated him or herself. Every student belonged to a subgroup, and had at least one friend. In fact, it seemed that even though the class willfully chose to divide itself, this was only for social security purposes. By that I mean, there were no rivalries or conflicts in the class between sub groups. By sitting next to students with a similar language or culture, I believe, this created a safe zone for everyone to then bridge out to befriend other students, but always be able to defer back to those people who could relate to one another best when cultural differences occurred.

Cheating: The International Language

Another interesting social interaction that happened at the beginning of the semester was a game played by all the students in the class. The teacher divided the

³ See Appendix B Journal entry Sept. 25

students into four teams. The four teams were lined up from the front to the back of the class with each team being divided into four columns. The rules of the game were simple. The teacher would tell the front student from each team a Chinese word that they then had to tell to the next person on their team. The rule was that you could only say the word. You could not give any other help other than to say the word. Additionally, the teams were required to say the word in succession from the first person to the last. Finally, once the last student was told the word, they were to race to the front of the class and write that word on the board, taking care to ensure that the correct tonal symbols were marked above the spelling.

From the word “go” the rules were thrown out, and it became the ultimate game of “who can cheat the best.” I should point out that there was nothing to be gained from winning other than pride. There would be no grade or lasting effect for the winning team. Teams were divided indiscriminately so the personalities and cultures represented in each team were diverse. At first I wanted to win, then I saw all the secret cheating styles going on, and couldn’t help but think that it was an important moment to document.

It was hard to say who the first team was to actively start cheating—honestly, I think most people in the class intended to cheat from the very beginning—and those who were going to do it the honest way joined in once they saw everyone else doing it. It was a thing of beauty watching the blatant cheating happening all around the classroom while the teacher remained blissfully ignorant. Teams were accusing other teams of cheating while they themselves quickly did their own cheating during the distraction. With each new word the cheating got more and more furtive because the teacher started

paying close attention. Soon native languages were creeping in, words were written on hands and notebooks. At that moment there were no countries of origin, you were either on their team or you were the enemy.

I don't remember who won the game—and it didn't matter—but because of that game the class was able to learn a lot about one another, and it set the tone for the rest of the semester. It gave me insight into the personalities of my classmates, allowing me a small glimpse into the past education each student had received. Some cheated blatantly from the beginning, and didn't really care if the teacher knew or not. These students (from Jordan, Somalia, and Tunisia) also proved to care the least about their studies as the semester continued. They were the ones that would leave for smoke breaks, or simply not show up at all. There were others who were more sneaky, and constantly watched the teacher to see what she was doing. These students seemed to care about whether they would get caught or not. These students were also the more diligent in finishing their homework.

Attendance to class started off strong at the beginning but began to wane as we moved into October. Part of this was caused by a complete lack of authority held by our Chinese instructors. The teachers took attendance, but it didn't really matter. The teachers gave homework assignments, but they didn't enter any grades. And while they did actually grade our papers, everyone got A's on everything. While There wasn't really a reason to try hard. You could get as much, or as little, out of the class as you wanted. Once the students realized good grades came easy, quite a few "checked out" mentally. It became common to see a couple of people sleeping in the back, or to show up an hour late to class. There were no consequences, so people did what they wanted. Of course,

students still learned and practiced the language, but there was no sense of urgency on the students' part to master the language.

As a Family

Moving to China can be difficult. Moving to China with a family is like completing the game on "expert" mode. My wife, Katie, is certainly defined as an introvert, and she'd be the first to admit it. Her introversion caused quite a bit of social anxiety and emotional upheaval. Going from a small town of roughly thirty thousand people, to a Chinese metropolis of over seven million, there were bound to be social rules she had carried over from American life that were violated. For Katie, it was personal space and routine. The notion of personal space in China is very different from American standards. Unless you're in your room, there will be someone nearby, and the imaginary bubble of distance will be much smaller than in America. As a very private person, Katie wasn't too pleased with this reality. As a family, we couldn't really disappear into a crowd either. This meant where ever we went, we were watched. Actually, watched is too passive. We were a modern-day novelty. A white couple will garner the occasional onlookers, and maybe a photo or two, but a family with a white baby is a far greater rarity.

Privacy was unobtainable, even in our apartment we could always hear our neighbors above, below, and beside us. Even when our neighbors were quiet, we still had to contend with each other. Living in a single room for several months that's roughly fifteen feet by eight feet isn't the best way to foster a strong marital relationship. Our social interactions were more tense and volatile than they'd ever been before. We argued

more in those four months than in all our marriage combined, and I know for a fact that the lack of privacy was a major cause.

Fortunately, we learned how to adjust to each other and altered the way we interacted with one other, and this helped keep the peace most of the time. I thought it was interesting the ways we adjusted in our smaller confines. One thing that helped was finding time to leave Katie alone in the apartment. I would take Eva with me to the grocery store or go for a walk so that Katie could have some quiet time. She reciprocated for me as well, allowing me to interact with friends as I saw fit.

One of my biggest adjustments was learning that our apartment was off limits to everyone but us. Katie exhibited expectancy violations theory more than a few times when I would do things that threw off her daily routine. I once brought friends over to our apartment, and I quickly learned never to do that again. Katie had very strict expectations about when I would be home, when we would eat, and when we would have family time. I realized that the best thing I could do to keep Katie happy was to keep a schedule and have a routine. Once we established a routine, Katie felt much better.

As An American

Being a white American in Changsha meant instant privilege. Being American immediately made me what the Chinese call "noble" class. Essentially, it made me important in their eyes. To illustrate what I mean I will describe a trip to the bank that happened in October.

As a student at HNU, I was awarded a scholarship to assist in my living expenses. In order to get my scholarship, I had to establish a bank account so that I could receive deposits and then withdraw my money. However, in China using cash is really the main

means of paying for things. This meant that using ATMs was the only means of being able to pay for things. Unfortunately, this also meant that ATMs were always busy near me. One day in particular, I went to my bank hoping to withdraw some money. To my dismay, I found all but one ATM out of money. This lone ATM was swarmed with people. Annoyed, I sat there for a few minutes deciding if I should try my luck and wait in line, or just come back another day. Before I could make up my mind a security guard walked up to me and beckoned me to follow him. As I nervously followed this random man, he used his radio to call someone at the bank. Within moments a woman came from inside the bank and filled an ATM with money. The security guard then escorted me through the long line to my own personal ATM while he stood behind me to ensure no one looked at my pin number. Things like this happened all the time.

Being American afforded me an interesting perspective on communication. I was able to see how the Chinese treat those they esteem worthy of their hospitality in contrast with those the Chinese didn't esteem as highly. In fact, there was a student from Pakistan that would get very angry about it. I never actually learned his name, but he lived in the same building as me. Now, being Pakistani he already had reason to be annoyed with me as a representative of America (America's policy of violating his country's sovereignty with military excursions didn't sit well with him), but my special treatment compared to his really irritated him.

For whatever reason, the Chinese don't esteem non-white foreigners as much as white ones. This reality caused some bitterness and resentment due to the obvious double standard the Chinese have for foreign guests in their country. Because of my "white privilege," nearly every conversation I had with this kid turned sour. He would

state how he'd lived in China for years, and yet an American can just arrive and be more respected and accepted than him. I tried my best to downplay the advantages, but he wouldn't accept it. The only thing I could really do was let him talk. This kind of communication was interesting to be a part of, but ultimately was unproductive. He didn't want to engage in any discourse, he just wanted to talk at me. This eventually led to my attempts at avoiding him whenever I saw him. I could see elements of convergence and divergence in our exchanges, but given his confrontational nature, and the fact that he was Pakistani, not Chinese, I reference this conversation merely to highlight the wide range of interactions I had each day. This conversation wasn't one that I thought should be analyzed in the broader context of the CAT portion of my paper because it would not fit in with my observations of the Chinese. It does, however, illustrate the point that accommodation was happening regardless of cultural background.

While these experiences constitute my day to day life in China, I must now switch from simple observation and reporting, and discuss the many experiences I had with communication accommodation between two cultures.

Communication Accommodation In China

Any conversation I had with any Chinese person in Changsha obviously had forms of accommodation by the very nature of our conversations, and the fact that I was a foreigner. Understanding this, I sought to find key places that I could really watch, and participate in, accommodation. There are a few key events and activities that I used for my primary locations of data gathering. The two biggest locations with the most interesting data were English Corner and the basketball court. Both these places fostered conversation in ways that simply weren't natural in other places. My observations on CAT will be based off the experiences I gained from participating in conversations at these locations. It's important to note that addressing every instance of accommodation would make this paper cumbersome and unmanageable. Therefore, my interactions with the Chinese will be organized by themes, rather than chronological order.

English Corner

As I mentioned earlier, English Corner was a place where students could go to practice their English while also getting the chance to discuss and debate different forms of political and social thought. The controversial nature of the topics discussed there naturally led to more passionate discussions, and therefore, better examples of communication accommodation.

I cannot discuss English Corner without also mentioning Robert. Robert is middle-aged man in his forties that loves America and adores Chairman Mao. This was surprising to me, because often the older generations are suspicious of America and adhere closer to Communist party ideals. Typically, I found that there was a definite age

divide where a line could be drawn between those over or under the age of thirty-five. For whatever reason, students and community members under the age of thirty-five were very open and receptive to all things "America," but once the community members were over thirty five, things seemed a bit more standoffish. It makes sense that the younger generation has been a part of China's blossoming onto the world stage their entire lives and therefore have been raised to be more open with Westerners, while the older generations still cling to the "old ways" of Chairman Mao, and the People's Party. Robert, however, was an outlier in this regard.

Robert was the one Chinese man you could always count on to converge in conversation. CAT states that accommodation can happen through two ways: convergence and divergence. And, of course, convergence is both verbal and non-verbal communication that seeks to mimic styles, and downplay differences in attempting to achieve a more effective mode of communication. Robert was very polished in his communication with me. He would duplicate my body language and sometimes repeat what I had said with nodding affirmation about whatever the topic might have been at the time.

The most interesting conversation I ever had with Robert actually came via a daylong trip I spent with him at the birthplace of Chairman Mao. During one night at English Corner he had invited me to take the hour-long drive with him to see where the "great" Mao had been raised. Naturally, I agreed to go. Seeing something like that is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so I jumped on it. Little did I know, I was going to be exposed to the eccentric personality that is Robert. Robert's adoration for Chairman Mao borders on worship. The best way I can describe how the older Chinese generations

see Mao would be to take Jesus Christ and George Washington, and make them one person. He is religion, and he is politics. Consider this passage from my journal:

The Chinese like to draw comparisons between Chairman Mao and George Washington. Multiple times during the trip Robert would say that Mao was the Chinese version of Washington. I suppose I can see a small parallelism in that both men united a whole country, but that's about as far as I'd take it. With Robert though, this was an absolute truth.

'How many men could be like Chairman Mao?,' Robert would ask aloud before answering his own question. 'He is a thousand year man; there will not be another like him for a long time.'⁴(J. Sorensen, personal communication, Sept. 12, 2013)

Robert assumed that Americans revere George Washington; therefore, he made comparisons between what he supposed I thought was great with what he thought was great to foster accommodation. There were two aspects of accommodation that I noticed throughout my day with him. First, I noticed just how much I was using convergent tactics with him. Anytime he would make a comparison between George Washington and Chairman Mao, I would agree with him for the sake of being a gracious guest. I would imitate his walking style of holding his hands together from behind his back. I was doing and saying things I didn't necessarily agree with, but I wanted to put on a good show for him and help him to feel comfortable with me there. This made me ask myself how genuine convergence or divergence tactics are in communication. For me, I didn't have the least bit of respect for Mao, but I was willing to pretend because I

⁴ See Appendix B Journal entry Sept. 12

wanted to fit in. Normally, it might not matter to me whether I approved or disapproved of Mao, but you can bet when you're at his house surrounded by thousands of Chinese people, you're going to sing his praises too.

This scenario highlights a potential flaw with CAT, in that convergence and divergence styles are simply tactics. I employed convergence in this instance because it suited my needs. I knew I needed to be a gracious guest, and ensure my ride back to Changsha, so I would have said just about anything so long as I knew I could make it back safely with my family. If I was so willing to go along with a pro-Mao sentiment just to improve my social relationship with Robert, then how likely are other Chinese students and community members to do the same with me in our conversations?

Looking at CAT with a broader lens, it becomes apparent why there were so many times that Dr. Stein and I thought our meetings were successful only to have problems reoccur later. Perhaps the Chinese were doing the same thing with us. After all, the Chinese culture is very much about accommodation. They very well may have simply been telling us what we wanted to hear, and agreeing with us because they felt they needed to, as we were their guests. If this is true though, that means that the strategies we employ in accommodation may actually be detrimental in the long term, as the opinions we pretend to espouse in short-term conversation would be difficult to maintain over a long period of time. I could not keep up my pro-Mao sentiment very long. By the end of the day, I was starting to ask passive aggressive questions about Mao in an innocent tone to try and discredit the dictator. So, if my interactions with Robert were projected out to months or years, this tactic of convergence would no longer work.

As SUU moves forward with the American Studies Center, it will be essential that they consider the tactics they use when working to accommodate the Chinese university and government. Sometimes divergence may seem detrimental in the short term, but in the long run, it may actually be of greater benefit than convergence.

Edward Snowden and the Fabricated Moon Landings

Apart from Robert, most older Chinese participants preferred divergence when talking with me. Of course, they were usually very kind even when exaggerating their differences, but one interaction that turned confrontational provided an interesting insight into Chinese divergence.

There was a man that I only met once, and I don't recall his name, but I nicknamed him "the Professor," because he was a professor of engineering at HNU. During our encounter, we had a "heated" discussion about the American space program. The following was my journal entry on the experience. It is important that I include the entire excerpt because it is relevant to see the context of the conversation, and its impact on CAT.

Oct. 8,

I met a guy at English Corner today that was a professor of engineering. As we talked about whatever, as we usually do, this guy brought up going into space, and how he hopes China can improve its space program. To this I said, "Yeah, I heard China is working on sending astronauts to the moon sometime in the next ten to fifteen years." I usually employ convergence when I talk to the older generations because it helps the conversation move along more smoothly. Besides, space exploration seemed like a nice way to "extend the olive branch"

because it's something that has fostered cooperation between countries over the last twenty years. I was surprised by his response though; he said, "Impossible, no one has ever landed on the moon." I laughed because I thought he was joking, but when I saw that he was serious I told him America did it like six times almost forty years ago. Apparently, I struck a nerve because he began to debate this, and brought out a little bit of Chinese nationalism as he argued his point.

As he tried to argue his point he crossed his arms, which usually indicates being closed off to information when used in this context. He said it was impossible because man could not survive in space. I had to tell him again and again that it really happened. What happened next actually shocked me because of how "left field" it was. He said, "Do you know who Edward Snowden is?" I said, "Yes." He continued, "Well, he released information about all the lies of America, and he said the moon landings were a lie."

I didn't know what to do. I started laughing even harder because of how ridiculous the comment was, even though I didn't laugh on purpose. I told him he was wrong, and that I'd be happy to have him prove otherwise (I should add that initially it was just the two of us talking, but as we began disagreeing a small group of students had congregated around us). Then he said, "I know it's true, I read it on the internet in Chinese news."

Fortunately, someone in the group responded to this so I didn't have to say something offensive. A person in the group said, "The Chinese internet? You think they actually tell the truth!?" Others joined in tearing down the professor's argument. It was a good example of the group dynamic of CAT. He was not

accommodating me in our conversation, he was being divergent, but not with the end goal of positive communication. Once the group recognized this, they self-regulated their own and shut him down (J. Sorensen, personal communication, Oct. 8, 2013).

It was true communication accommodation in action. Initially, when it was just the two of us, he decided that he wanted to make it an argument and adopted divergence. This moment made me question what divergence actually is. Perhaps divergence, at times, is a form of power struggle within conversation. Divergence may actually be a tactic used to decide who is in charge of the conversation. In this instance, the man's objective was to be right. I found that even as we disagreed, I would do my best to appeal to the great things his country was doing to improve their own space program without being derogatory to China. I was trying to accommodate him and spare his feelings while also defending history. The problem was I was willing to converge, but not enough to accommodate him in his mind. As other students noticed our conversation, they began to join in the debate. Not one person took his side, however. I found this interesting for several reasons. First, he was a professor while everyone else was a student. I would have thought that his social standing would have overruled what the students thought.

Next, when this man was confronted by his cultural peers, he backed down and accepted the group dynamic. He stopped trying to plead his case and joined in the new topic that came up afterwards as students changed the subject. It became as if nothing had even happened. He did not disengage from our conversations, but his behavior did become more accommodating.

Basketball

One block to the right of my apartment complex was an outdoor basketball court where the locals would go to play every day from about 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. I found out pretty quickly that my athletic endeavors would open up the door to a unique perspective of communication accommodation.

About three times a week, I would go and play basketball with complete strangers. Of course, over time I began to get to know some of them, and those whose names I didn't remember, I at least became familiar with their faces, and they with mine. I thought it would be important to include a different perspective to CAT than just English Corner, because English Corner could represent a bias sample, as everyone there spoke varying degrees of English. Additionally, I worried that my sample was also attracting too many people who were pro-Western and, thus, might be skewing my experience. Basketball was the perfect counter to sample bias. I'd say only about twenty percent of the people I played with spoke any English. And of those that did, even fewer could use it conversationally. This gave me a great opportunity to see how cultures accommodate when they can barely speak to one another in the first place. One journal entry speaks to this subject.

Aug 28,

After about five days here, I am beginning to realize that playing basketball with the locals is a really natural form of analysis for CAT. In some of my initial interactions I have found that both convergence and divergence have taken place. Most players will attempt what little English they know to communicate with me. They'll ask me in broken English to play basketball with them, or to explain the

score or rule. When English won't work, body language becomes the main conversational tool.

One thing that I have noticed is that convergence and divergence cannot be defined by whether they speak English or not. Often, even though they'll speak Chinese, their body language implies convergence. Many times they'll even mimic my English, despite not knowing what it means. For instance, occasionally, I will say something like "Good shot" or "Foul," and they'll start using the term during our game.

Likewise for me, I'll start mimicking their words. The first word I've learned in Chinese since being here is "Fan gui" or "Fan gui le." Even though I didn't know the actual translation for a few days, I knew it meant "foul." (It actually translates to "illegal", but the meaning is the same). When speaking to them, I try everything in my power to speak what little Chinese I know, so that I can fit in⁵ (J. Sorensen, personal communication, Aug. 28, 2013).

The biggest thing I identified during my games was non-verbal convergence. People didn't need to speak English to hold conversations with me during the games. Hand gestures and facial expressions became the most important tools in accommodation. We each did everything we could to assist comprehension during our games and while we rested. I tried my hardest to learn their words and how they were used. Another word I learned was "Piàoliang" (which translates to "beautiful"). I didn't learn this word's actual meaning for about three weeks, but from day one I knew it was congratulatory in some way. Anytime someone made a nice pass or a good shot I'd

⁵ See Appendix B Journal entry Aug. 28

constantly hear them say it. Naturally, I started imitating the word as close as I could during the games.

The Chinese would also start using all the English they knew during basketball games—which at times was hilarious. There were a few times when one of them would miss a shot and shout “God-damn son of bitch” or the F-word, as they ran after the ball or opponent. Each time they’d say this, they’d look over to me to see my reaction. I’m not one for gratuitous swearing, but I’ll admit, I laughed almost every time I heard it. I don’t think they truly knew what they were saying, only that they were using swear words.

These instances were important, as they showed attempts at convergence when there was very little to say otherwise. These few phrases showed they were trying to relate to me, and trying to fit in, even though I was the foreigner. When we both used what little of each other’s language that we knew, it succeeded in creating common ground and a sense of camaraderie. It showed me that intention and effort are often the most important tools in convergence. I was able to become good friends with some of my basketball buddies over time, even though we couldn’t really speak well—or at all—to one another.

Accommodating Through Divergence

Prior to coming to China, I had a hard time understanding how divergence could actually aid in communication accommodation. I didn’t think it was possible to improve the conversation by trying hard to be as different from the person or group as possible. However, this is exactly what the Chinese expected of me. The Chinese wanted me to be

as American as possible. Granted, they didn't say "Jay, act American," but they certainly preferred it. In one journal entry I wrote:

I often will diverge to accommodate in conversation. It wasn't this way in the beginning, but people here expect me to act "American." There is a bit of a novelty to it that they like. They act surprised, and disappointed, if I try to be too Chinese. They expect me to be different. This has made it hard to know if I'm really accommodating them at all. I don't know if the way I'm acting is how they want me to behave, but they seem to respond positively to my efforts. I feel strange to accommodate to a group by purposefully disagreeing with some of the country's core beliefs or ideologies, but they seem to drink it up, and even agree with me on the issues⁶(J. Sorensen, personal communication, Oct. 30, 2013).

Acting American consisted of exaggerating my Western style and personality. They wanted me to dress American, talk American, and discuss American topics. Occasionally, they'd ask me what I thought of China, but the questions would always return to how it compared to America, or how China could be more like the US. There were a few times when I would try to be positive about China, but they didn't like it that much. If I complimented China they'd be the ones to retort. I'd get responses like "Are you serious?" or "You're just being nice." Other answers would even be disparaging, like "China is a developing country" or "Maybe for you China is good, not for us."

I had a hard time understanding this stance. America is a great country, but we have our own problems too. Their ideas of America sounded more like something you'd see in a 1950's John Wayne movie directed by John Ford. The only way I could wrap my

⁶ See Appendix B Journal entry Oct. 30

head around it was to consider the vast amount of American film and television that come into the country. I think when compared to their own country, America sounds like a dream. There is certainly a divide right now in China. The younger generation seems very disconnected from their country. They want change and they want it now.

Even though I chose to diverge after social circumstances encouraged it, I would still utilize elements of convergence. I began to simplify my English when talking to them. In fact, I found that I started developing speech patterns more familiar with the Chinese language while speaking English. For example, when saying thank you in Chinese, you say, "xie xie" (this literally translates to thank thank). By saying the word twice, it adds emphasis. This started affecting my own speech style. There would be times when I'd say a word twice unconsciously with the intent of adding emphasis. This was a form of convergence, and I began doing it without thinking. It just happened naturally. So, while I would be divergent in topics and opinions I had, I still incorporated convergence in linguistic style, and through my non-verbals.

A second linguistic habit I picked up was using the poorly framed English the Chinese spoke to me. For example, anytime I played a game, or even studied with Chinese students, we'd inevitably have breaks. Instead of saying something like "Let's take a break" the Chinese would almost exclusively say, "Have a rest." I began saying this all the time because I knew they would understand it immediately. Naturally, they would have known what I meant if I spoke normally, but I just started doing this because it was how they said it. It wasn't until one of my Chinese friends pointed it out that I even noticed. I would stand close to them, be engaging and smile, and all these things made our conversations go well because I was following their social rules.

What It All Means

Given that my experience was essentially a lesson in intercultural diplomacy, and that the American Studies Center continues to exist despite the end of my tenure there, it is clear that there are several ways my experience impacts how future students and employees should approach running the center. First, the center should make no apologies for what it represents. It is an ambassador of the United States of America and should always put its best foot forward. Its activities should embrace American culture and heritage while also encouraging China to promote its own. Activities should also focus on the people themselves and foster discourse that makes everyone feel needed.

The center should understand the culture of accommodation that China exhibits and realize that “smiles and great meetings” might not mean the deal is done. In fact, there very well may be many more hoops to jump through than will be initially thought. But, by understanding how to communicate effectively, and how to use convergent and divergent forms of communication at the appropriate time, solutions will be found, and progress will be made.

My personal experience befriending the Chinese community will hopefully give good insight to future students who intend on coming to HNU. Perhaps learning to embrace the cultural differences China presents will help students make friends faster and communicate more proficiently. China’s cultural combination of accommodation, and personal pride can seem like a tricky mine field to navigate at times, but patience and good communication can overcome most obstacles.

Therefore, the overall strategy of the center should be one of divergence. And to a certain extent, that is what our activities attempted to do. Baseball, Thanksgiving,

football, etc., are all examples of things we don't have in common culturally, but this doesn't mean that effective communication is being lost. As stated earlier, this divergence is what will actually build relationships over time. Granted, there may be times when cultural friction occurs, but this long-term strategy will be the best way to go.

Other Research Opportunities

China provides a ripe field for many different studies within communication. I didn't realize how much there was to potentially study until I was too far along to switch to something else. As I mentioned before, even within communication accommodation theory, the opportunity to study the interaction of more than three cultures within one context was an alluring prospect. CAT focuses primarily on the interaction of two cultures, but it would have been a great study to see how this theory would handle the amount of cultures represented in my class. Granted, even with so many countries being represented, cultures were more representative of regions of the world rather than geographical borders, but not withstanding that fact, there were still at least six very different cultures. There were many times when I was able to watch the interaction of these very different cultures and watch what might make it difficult for them to relate to one another.

Another study I think would have been productive is expectancy violation. The Chinese in Changsha are not used to seeing many foreigners in their country. Americans, in particular, are even more rare. Because of this, Chinese expect Americans to act a certain way. If I could do it all over again, it might have been interesting to analyze how they respond to an American foreigner who does not fulfill their

expectations. I could begin the study with a focus group that asked Chinese to describe how an American looks and acts, then try to do everything the opposite of what they expect, and note their reactions.

Finally, terror management theory would be interesting to study in a place like China. Understanding how Chinese deal with the inevitability of death, especially with such a lack of religion, would be worthwhile. Terror management theory deals with physical and social death salience, and China is a place where both happen often. With the apparent lack of job opportunities and upward mobility in China, it would seem that the Chinese would be far more likely to experience cognitive dissonance when things don't go as planned. Additionally, without religion there isn't really hope for anything better after death. This means that social failure might be seen as worse than actual death, because there is no mainstream "there after" in China. Researching how the Chinese cope with these realities would be an interesting study to say the least. It would also be interesting to see how the lack of religion plays a role in daily life there. Has a lack of religion afforded the Chinese greater happiness or misery? Perhaps neither?

Conclusion

I learned a lot about myself in China. I discovered strengths I didn't know I had, but weaknesses too. I found areas that I excelled in, and others where I was found lacking. Taking a family to the other side of the world might well be the most difficult thing I've done in my entire life thus far. It was an experience that I'll never forget, and the lessons I learned will give me a wealth of knowledge to draw from in the future when challenges inevitably come again. One lesson that I've taken away from this experience is that accommodation is a process with varying levels. When using CAT for brief

interactions, it seems to be a tactic based on quick observation, but once friendships develop and social defenses drop, convergent and divergent strategies can be great tool to improve relationships.

While divergent tactics seem confusing, there appear to be three outcomes that are produced. First, is a non-satisfactory result in which divergence does not accomplish the roles of accommodation for either person or group engaged in communication and the conversation ends in frustration. The second result is tolerance, which results in neither party achieving satisfactory results, yet still produces some accommodation as both sides do not want escalation in disagreement. The third result of satisfaction was the most common use of divergence during my time in China. This divergence leads to accommodation and understanding. This form of divergence can be seen by the way the Changsha people preferred me to "act" American. This divergence aids in understanding and promotes accommodation.

I'm glad I was able to forge new paths and trails for the American Studies Center, with Dr. Stein and all those who helped make this center a reality. There were so many experiences had, friends made, and times shared, that this paper could become a series of papers. China opens up countless avenues of potential research and opportunity. I hope that the ASC will find success in the future, and that the unity between China and the US will strengthen in the future.

Engaging in research as an auto-ethnographer was the perfect way to study accommodation styles while in Changsha. The "hands on" approach to understanding intercultural communication and accommodation was the best way for me to learn. To observe and report was beneficial, but to engage and understand was life changing.

Communication accommodation is something billions of people unknowingly engage in every day, and learning how to use it more effectively will foster growth in all aspects of my life.

My experience has helped me look at daily communication between friends, family, and colleagues and understand when and where to converge or diverge in conversation and why. It's taught me that people feel the need to belong and be understood, and likewise want others to understand and belong too. Convergence strategies aid in this pursuit. Also, people want to be acknowledged as unique and individual human beings who have value in this life, and sometimes divergence is needed to illustrate that point.

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Appendix A



AMERICAN STUDIES CENTER PLEDGE



作为美国学习中心的一
员，我将尽力促进中美
两国相互学习，加深了
解，增进友谊；孜孜不
倦，与中国朋友合作；
探寻中美共识，不断提
高中美关系。故签下该
承诺，为致力于该事业
的同伴树立榜样。

As a member of the American Stud-
ies Center, I will do my best to promote
friendship, learning, and understanding
between China and America.

I will study diligently, learn effectively, and
work well with my fellow students. I will
discover the similarities that draw our two
countries together, and identify areas for
improvement.

By signing this pledge, I promise to be an
example of these principles amongst my
peers.

• CHANGSHA •



*Come join
the conversation!!!*

**QQ group:
157848276**

Location:

Room 610 Foreign Studies College



*Come join
the conversation!!!*

**QQ group:
157848276**

Location:

Room 610 Foreign Studies College



QQ: 157848276

Email: ASC@suu.edu

Foreign Studies College 610

www.suu.edu/asc



*Come join
the conversation!!!*

**QQ group:
157848276**

Location:

Room 610 Foreign Studies College



*Come join
the conversation!!!*

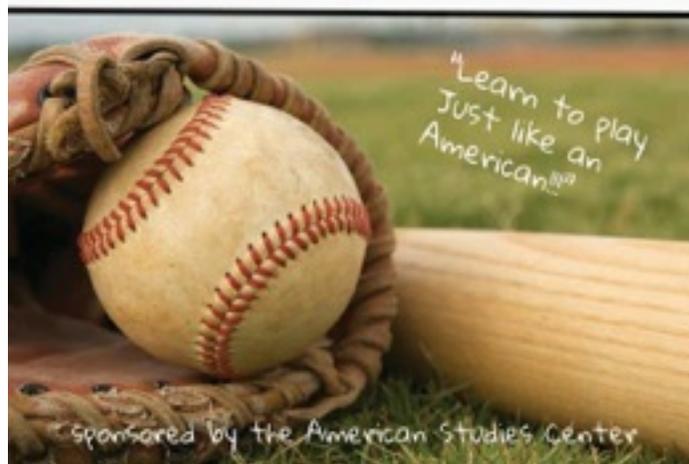
**QQ group:
157848276**

Location:

Room 610 Foreign Studies College

Want to Learn Baseball?

What: Learn to play Baseball!
Where: Outside the Mulan building
When: This Thursday, 4pm
Who: American students and you!!!



美国学研究中心办活动喽...

圣诞节到啦!

我们的活动包括:
 圣诞节表演, 装扮姜饼人,
 一起谈论美国人的圣诞节

时间: 2013年12月28日
 晚上: 19:00-21:30
 地点: 外国语学院610



THE AMERICAN STUDIES CENTER PRESENTS:

A MERRY CHRISTMAS IN CHINA!

ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:

A CHRISTMAS PERFORMANCE,
DECORATING GINGER BREAD MEN,
AND AN OPEN DISCUSSION ABOUT
CHRISTMAS IN AMERICA

DATE: DECEMBER 28TH *TIME: 19:00-21:30*
LOCATION: FOREIGN STUDIES COLLEGE ROOM 610

Thanksgiving Event

AMERICAN FOOTBALL CHALLENGE

LEARN TO THROW A FOOTBALL!
COMPETE FOR GREAT PRIZES
MADE IN AMERICA!

16:00 AT THE BASKETBALL COURT ACROSS FROM THE CANTEEN

Then...

learn the history of Thanksgiving, try American Pie, and watch an American Movie!



19:00 Thursday, room 610
Foreign Studies Building

APPENDIX B

Communication Accommodation Journal Entries

(Journal entries in this appendix represent only those notes included in the paper. For a complete chronological record of my experiences visit: <http://redstampnation.wordpress.com/>)

Aug 28

After about five days here, I am beginning to realize that playing basketball with the locals is a really natural form of analysis for CAT. In some of my initial interactions I have found that both convergence and divergence have taken place. Most players will attempt what little English they know to communicate with me. They'll ask me in broken English to play basketball with them, or to explain the score or rule. When English won't work, body language becomes the main conversational tool.

One thing that I have noticed is that convergence and divergence cannot be defined by whether they speak English or not. Often, even though they'll speak Chinese, their body language implies convergence. Many times they'll even mimic my English, despite not knowing what it means. For instance, occasionally I will say something like "Good shot" or "Foul" and they'll start using the term during our game.

Likewise for me, I'll start mimicking their words. The first word I've learned in Chinese since being here is "Fan gui" or "Fan gui le." Even though I didn't know the actual translation for a few days I knew it meant "foul" (It actually translates to "illegal," but the meaning is the same). When speaking to them I try everything in my power to speak what little Chinese I know so that I can fit in. The question then arises, "what happens when both participants in a conversation are trying to converge?" We each

seem to try to fit in with the other, but this mutual convergence at least shows that we're trying to accommodate one another.

September 12,

Last Thursday, I met a man in his mid-forties who called himself Robert. Robert was very friendly and eager to chat with me. He told me that he was a very successful English teacher for a local academy, and that he had taught English for twenty years. After a twenty-minute conversation about America, China, and pop culture, he invited us to go with him to see the childhood house of his beloved leader Mao Zedong.

Hesitantly, I agreed to go with him sometime—thinking that this would be one of those invitations that would never come to pass—so you can imagine my surprise when he started setting the day shortly after saying "yes." Unable to backtrack, and not wanting to turn down a free ride to the Southern part of the province, I stayed the course.

"Next weekend?" he asked, but I couldn't because I would be taking my family on a trip at that time. "How about two weekends from now" I responded, but he decided that date was too far off. Finally, after some consultation, we agreed that Sunday would be a good day to go. After our plans were set, we shook hands and said goodbye until Sunday.

The experience would prove to be memorable.....to say the least.

Sunday morning we woke up and were out the door by 7:45am. We met Robert and his friend Dawson at 8am sharp, and they were there on time as well. We gathered into Dawson's SUV along with a girl named Lily—who was a student of Roberts—but not before Robert grabbed a thirty-year old bottle of Maotai (a very expensive bottle of

Alcohol), which he said he brought to drink with friends. Despite my having already told him that we didn't drink, he said he would bring it anyways. Realizing that I shouldn't push the issue, I relented and away we went.

(As an aside, I should tell you that the fear I feel in walking outside in China was multiplied ten-fold after having been on the inside of a car driving down the Chinese freeway. The most alarming sight was watching a car zip past us doing maybe 80 mph, then proceeding into the far right emergency lane on the even more right shoulder of the freeway which he used to pass two semi-trucks who were already on what I thought was the far lane. Turns out, in China you just go where ever you want. And, Just wait until I tell you about the return trip in my next post!)

We arrived at Mao's Childhood home by about 10am, and picked up a hitchhiker who was actually a tour guide. Once they realized how much she was going to charge they kicked her out of the car and decided that they could give the tour without spending any money.

After a good half hour of looking for parking, walking down roads, and avoiding stares from curious country-folk, we finally arrived at the house. There were already many people who had come from all over the country to see his house. There were metal detectors that everyone had to pass through to enter a line to eventually enter his house. The metal detectors were beeping all over the place, but the security guard didn't seem to mind. He barely twitched as I passed through with the light above me flashing red and the warning siren going off. It reminded me that much of what you see in China is more for show than actual use.

We stood in line maybe fifteen minutes before entering into Mao's house. Once

inside, Robert poured out praise to Mao. In fact, Robert would proceed to talk about Mao constantly for another 8 hours. I was taken back by the high esteem he had for Mao. Obviously, it should be expected that the average Chinese man or woman would like him, but this went beyond mere admiration, and bordered on obsession.

The Chinese like to draw comparisons between Chairman Mao and George Washington. Multiple times during the trip they would say that Mao was the Chinese version of Washington. I suppose I can see a small parallelism in that both men united a whole country, but that's about as far as I'd take it. The means and methods by which each accomplished their goals was very different.

"How many men could be like Chairman Mao?" Robert would ask aloud before answering his own question, "He is a thousand year man; there will not be another like him for a long time."

After seeing the place where Mao grew up, we went to lunch. Now, you have to understand, I barely knew Robert before we agreed to go with him on this trip. We had little insight into who he was or what the day would have in store for us. My wife and I thought this trip would take two to three hours and be done. However, this was not the case. At one point, I thanked him for the great experience we had had together only to have him respond, "Don't thank me yet, we have much more to see today!" For future reference, when a Chinese man says this you better take a deep breath and acknowledge that you're going to be there for awhile. Those two to three hours we expected to spend there came and went all before lunch even happened.

Katie and I both looked at each other. and had a mental conversation without saying any words. Actually, I didn't need any words, her facial expressions said it all. We

both knew we would be in this for the long-haul. We were a good eighty miles from Changsha, and completely dependent on Robert and Dawson to get us home safely. There would be no going home until they said it was time to go home. With a little smile we shrugged to one another, and thought to ourselves "When in China.....". We might as well embrace it, because we certainly weren't getting out of it!

The only major divergence between us was smoking and drinking. In these instances he drank and smoked during our lunch and dinner together. He said it was Chinese tradition to drink with friends. however, after explaining our religious beliefs he allowed us to just drink a soda with him. I should note that he pressed me REALLY hard to drink. He tried at least a dozen times to change my mind. As a compromise, he asked if I would at least drink beer because it's alcohol content is so low. I obviously told him I wouldn't have any, regardless of alcohol content. It was interesting to observe because you could visibly see the conflict of accommodation in his mind. On the one hand he was paying for everything, he was host, and he was in charge. To him, I needed to do as he asked to be polite. On the other hand though, he needed to be gracious to a guest and foreigner, as well as respect my religious beliefs. He was momentarily put off, and his body language reflected it by the way he sat back. However, just as quickly as he had become annoyed, he was back to normal and happy again. I was extremely uncomfortable socially for about ten minutes, and was relieved once lunch was over.

One thing I noticed is that Robert wanted to show me how "American" he could be. Some examples would be speaking English to people he knew clearly couldn't speak it. He would also go to stores and try to buy goods using American money knowing it wouldn't be accepted. He even got confrontational with a few Chinese people who

wouldn't accept his American money. He'd say to them "Don't you know what this is?" " This is American money; I'm here with my American friends, and you won't take their money." He did all this to be funny, and the Chinese people at the other side of his conversation just stared blankly wondering why this random man was yelling at them in English.

Sept 26,

This past Thursday we had over fifty people attend English Corner, and a popular topic has been the American notion of freedom. The Chinese are very interested in the idea of freedom of thought. I've been very surprised by the group mentality in these settings. I would expect them to be united in their opinions, but instead of straight convergence or divergence, there are always one or two people in the group that diverge, while the rest converge.

With the conversations of freedom of thought, many people in the group stated that they really wanted this in their own country. However, one person diverged from the group and thought that too much freedom of thought can lead to infighting. Despite the fact that everyone else liked it, he remained defiant and diverged.

I find this interesting for two reasons. First, I would have thought most people would agree and hold the opinion of the diverging boy. I also didn't think I would see any divergence in this group setting, especially considering that it's usually me versus five to ten Chinese people. I would have thought nationalism, and their collectivist culture would make it easier to agree and disagree as a group, and that individual personalities would be subdued. However, others in the group began arguing amongst themselves instead of with me. So, in a sense, I suppose group convergence did happen,

just not in the way I expected. The group chose to converge with my American way of thinking, rather than the official Chinese stance. This all happened without my prompting the conversation one way or the other. They adhered to the American views of freedom on their own. In fact, the topic of freedom of expression was brought up by someone in the group. They mostly discussed this topic amongst themselves and only asked me questions when they wanted to confirm how things “really are” in America.

Oct. 1,

I went to English Corner yesterday and was again surprised by the group dynamic that existed during our conversation. The Chinese brought up the topic of educational competition and the great difficulties the people face in finding a job. This led to a discussion of the Chinese government. they suggested that the government needed to change. One noticeable sign of convergence was seeing several people mimicking my body language as we talked. I would fold my arms while talking, and they would do the same. Later I dropped my arms in front of me with one hand holding the other. A few minutes later, a few people in the group would do the same.

I was also quite surprised by how highly critical the Chinese have been about their own government. I never would have thought prior to coming that the Chinese would act this way. There are a few times when a person will diverge from the group and like the Communist Party of China, but overall, they seem to use group convergence in agreeing about their great dislike of the current political and economical practices.

Oct. 8

I met a guy at english corner today that was a professor of engineering. As we talked about whatever, as we usually do, this guy brought up going into space, and how

he hopes China can improve its space program. To this I said, "yeah, I heard China is working on sending astronauts to the moon sometime in the next ten to fifteen years." I usually employ convergence when I talk to the older generations because it helps the conversation move along more smoothly. Besides, space exploration seemed like a nice way to "extend the olive branch" because its something that has fostered cooperation between countries over the last twenty years. I was surprised by his response though, he said, "Impossible, no one has ever landed on the moon." I laughed because I thought he was joking, but when I saw that he was serious I told him America did it like six times almost forty years ago. Apparently, I struck a nerve though because he began to debate this and brought out a little bit of Chinese nationalism as he argued his point.

As he tried to argue his point he crossed his arms, which usually indicates being closed off to information when used in this context, he said it was impossible because man could not survive in space. I had to tell him again and again that it really happened. What happened next actually shocked me because of how "left field" it was. He said, "Do you know who Edward Snowden is?" I said, "Yes." He continued, "Well, he released information that about all the lies of America, and he said the moon landings were a lie."

I didn't know what to do, I started laughing even harder because of how ridiculous the comment was, even though I didn't laugh on purpose. I told him he was wrong, and that I'd be happy to have him prove otherwise (I should add that initially it was just the two of us talking but as we began disagreeing a small group of students had congregated around us). Then he said, " I know it's true, I read it on the internet in Chinese news."

Fortunately, someone in the group responded to this so I didn't have to say

something offensive. A person in the group said, "The Chinese internet? You think they actually tell the truth!?" Others joined in tearing down the Professor's argument. It was a good example of the group dynamic of CAT. He was not accommodating me in our conversation, he was being divergent but not with the end goal of positive communication. Once the group recognized this, they self-regulated their own and shut him down.

Oct. 30,

I've been watching the Chinese conversations that take place in English Corner and other locations for over two months now, and have noticed that when the Chinese speak to one another they don't use many hand gestures. However, when speaking Chinese (or English) to someone who doesn't understand the language, they increase their hand gestures to aid in comprehension.

In group settings that constitute many Chinese and myself, I notice they will use hand gestures to accent their responses to me specifically, but when they speak to other Chinese in the group, they no longer use them. It makes me wonder if this is for my benefit i.e. to accommodate to my cultural speaking style, or if it is the product of assisting communication in general. In other words, I wonder if the Chinese use more body language with me because they feel they cannot sufficiently explain their emotions with English alone, so they compensate by increasing body language to aid in my understanding of what they're saying.

One aspect that proves problematic for really knowing real opinion is the culture of accommodating. I can't speak for all foreigners, but with me, the Chinese are all too eager to befriend and agree with me. In politics, ideology, and many other social issues,

the Chinese will align with whatever my opinion of the subject might be. They clearly converge in the conversation to accommodate me, but it makes it difficult to know what their real opinions are on our topics of conversation. Conversely, I often will diverge to accommodate in conversation. It wasn't this way in the beginning, but people here expect me to act "American." There is a bit of a novelty to it that they like. They act surprised, and disappointed if I try to be too Chinese. They expect me to be different. This has made it hard to know if I'm really accommodating them at all. I don't know if the way I'm acting is how they want me to act, but they seem to respond positively to my efforts. I feel strange to accommodate to a group by purposefully disagreeing with some of the country's core beliefs or ideologies, but they seem to drink it up, and even agree with me on the issues.

The Chinese culture is one of accommodation. They can be some of the most gracious hosts in the world. English Corner was no exception to this fact. Naturally, there were times when we would disagree on topics, but overall, my interactions at English Corner (and elsewhere for that matter) were always filled with a convergent theme. In one journal entry, I took note of the overarching themes of accommodation that I had witnessed.