

# **The cultural obstacles of Asian exchange students at The Hague University (THU)**

**A better integration of Asian exchange students in the cultural environment of the educational system of THU**



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## Executive Summary

This research was conducted to find out what the cultural obstacles of Asian exchange students at The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THU) are, and in particular at the Academy of European Studies & Communication Management (ESCM). The research report aims at providing useful recommendations for the Guest Student Office of the ESCM academy of THU.

A significant number of exchange and international students experience stress in adapting to a new cultural environment, new educational settings and teaching systems. However this research is mainly focused on Asian exchange students coming THU, for either one or two semesters. Differences in culture and environment causes Asian students to experience stress, or a culture shock, which can affect the physical and mental health of students. It can also cause school grades to decrease. The main adjustment challenges of Asian exchange students are dietary changes, academic stress, discrimination and language barriers. However, the right preparation beforehand and a good adaptability to the host culture, can reduce the experience of a culture shock to a minimum. In this research, the two dimensions Individualism & Collectivism and Power Distance, by the Dutch organizational psychologist Geert Hofstede, will be used as a measuring tool to give a general overview of the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, within the concept of these dimensions. Some of the obstacles that Asian students at THU experience are the following: Dutch and English language barriers, relatively low or no contact with Dutch students, difficulties with the Dutch teaching system and a need (and will) from the students' side to learn and experience Dutch culture. The Asian students can be helped with their needs with a little help. Thus the following recommendations are given to the ESCM academy of THU:

- Giving the Asian exchange students more practical information about living in The Netherlands during the introduction week.
- Setting up a "buddy system": A Dutch student supervises a group of Asian students.
- Incorporating a short 'crash-course' Dutch for Asian exchange students.
- The opportunity for professional student counseling.
- Setting up study support groups.

To find out the difficulties Asian exchange students go through during the exchange in The Netherlands, and subsequently to find out the needs of the students, in-depth interviews were conducted with the following persons/groups:

- Asian exchange students
- The country tutor of Asia at THU
- A representative of the International Office at THU
- A representative of the International Office of the academy of "Social Sciences" at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

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## Introduction

In The Netherlands, the percentage of international students has increased significantly in the past five years: the international student population in academic or research-oriented higher education (Wetenschappelijk onderwijs, WO) has increased from 7.7% to 11.2%; and for higher professional education (Hoger Beroepsonderwijs, HBO) this percentage increased 0.8%, from 6.0% to 6.8%. **(NUFFIC, 2012)**. Around 10 percent of the students at Dutch universities come from abroad, and at the polytechnic level, the non-Dutch students account for about 6.5 percent. And the largest group of students from abroad are, after the Germans, the Chinese students. **(Smet, 2012)**. Sometimes, Dutch students and students from abroad are assigned to a group project to work together. However, this is not without minor cultural obstacles. Some students from abroad perceive the Dutch as helpful, but too direct and confrontational. On the other hand, the foreign students are much more polite and come up with formal plans of actions when working in a group with the Dutch. **(Smet, 2012)**. According to Rienties & Tempelaar (2013), educators believe that a significant number of international students are not sufficiently adjusted to higher education in their respective host country, both academically as well as socially. Furthermore, several groups of students experience stress while adapting to the culture of the host-institute. This phenomenon is referred to as “culture shock”: a multifaceted experience that results from the numerous stressors that occur when coming into contact with a different culture. **(Neuliep, 2009)**.

Since the world has become a “global village” it is possible for people to go to other countries for work, to study or simply travel. Thus, it is very important to understand the culture in the respective country and to deal with culture differences in the best possible way. Many Asian (Eastern) countries are considered to be collectivist whereas many European and American (Western) countries are considered to be individualist. A society is considered collectivist when the interests of a group prevail over those of an individual, and on the other hand a society is considered individualist when the interests of an individual prevails over the interests of a group. **(Hofstede, 2005)**. Every person has collectivism and individualism in him/herself. However, the degree of both individualism and collectivism can be different. As a consequence, for a more “collectivist” person it may be very hard to adjust to a society which is individualist, as is the case for an “individualist” living in a collectivist society. And this situation is the same for Power Distance: the inequality which naturally exists between people and within cultures. Power distance is defined by Hofstede (2005) as “the extent to which the less powerful members

of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally". Asian countries usually have a large power distance, whereas most European and American countries have a small power distance. Thus, when someone from a country, with a large power distance, moves to a country with a relatively small power distance, the individual can become confused on how to use their communication the right way. **(Neuliep, 2009).**

This research will be conducted for the Guest Student Office of the ESCM academy at THU. The main focus group of the research is the group of Asian exchange students coming to THU. The reason for this is because it is personally very interesting to me, to know how students with a very different culture cope with the Dutch culture. The Guest Student Office of the ESCM academy at THU would be able to provide me with a lot of information, to be able to conduct research about the difficulties of Asian exchange students. At the end of the research recommendations will be given for The Guest Students Office in order to accommodate Asian exchange students better at THU and in The Netherlands.

Every semester there are several hundreds of guest students coming to The Hague University to study for a semester or two. They come from every part of the world: America, Africa, Asia, Europe etc. However, these students will most likely face cultural differences, since every culture has minor or major differences with another culture and as a result everybody thinks, acts and feels different than one another. **(Hofstede, 2005).** This research will be based upon the incoming Asian guest students studying at The Hague University, for either one or two semesters. The research will be about the obstacles Asian guest students might face when coming to The Netherlands to study. Thus the research question is: **"What are the main cultural obstacles of Asian guest students in the educational setting of THU?"**. The sub questions for the research are the following:

- *What are the general cultural differences between Eastern and Western cultures, using the collectivism & individualism and power distance dimensions by Hofstede?*
- *What information was provided to the Asian guest students by THU and by their home institution?*
- *Benchmarking: The information exchange of other universities to their guest students.*
- *What is the adaptation process for the Asian guest students in The Netherlands and at THU?*

The two dimensions Individualism & Collectivism and Power Distance, by the Dutch organizational psychologist Geert Hofstede, will be used to define the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, within the concept of these dimensions. Only these two dimensions were used because it fits well within the research. On the school level, power distance is the dimension that relates well to the difference in relationships with teachers from THU and with teachers from the home institution. **(Yu, 2013)**. The collectivism & individualism dimension relates to the general differences between an Asian society and the Dutch society; the Dutch society is mainly individualist and Asian societies are mostly collectivist. **(Hofstede, 2005)**. Afterwards, a comparison will be made between the two cultures, adjusted to educational settings. The preparation of the Asian students for the exchange to The Netherlands will be researched; both the information given by THU and the home institution will be analyzed. The support the students get from THU and the home institution will be analyzed as well. And lastly, to analyze the students' adaptation process, in-depth interviews will be conducted. Throughout the research, there will be an overview of the cultural obstacles Asian guest students have at THU while adapting to the new environment in The Netherlands, as well as a focus on their needs. The purpose of this research is to better integrate the Asian guest students in the educational setting of The Hague University.

## Research Methods

### Method of Research

This research is an empirical research, and the research methods that will be used are the following:

- Desk-research
- Interviewing (qualitative, in-depth)

### Goal of the Research

The goal of this research is to find out what cultural obstacles Asian students at The Hague University have, while adapting to their new environment in The Netherlands. The recommendations are about what THU can adapt in their information exchange to the exchange students, to equip them better to their new cultural and social environment in both the university and The Netherlands.

### Data Collection – Interviewing, qualitative

In order to find out what support the Asian students get from THU and their home institution *during their exchange*, interviews will be conducted with:

- 5 Asian students, to gather in-depth qualitative information
- The country tutor for Asia at THU
- A representative of the International Office at THU
- A representative of the Guest Student Office at Erasmus

The location for the interviews is The Hague University, except for the interview of the representative of the Guest Student Office at Erasmus, which is an interview over the phone.

In order to find out the Asian students' adaptation processes to THU, in-depth interviews were conducted. The adaptation process included the students' experiences in The Netherlands, their cultural obstacles and their needs. The questions to the students included the following topics: support from THU and home institution, information from THU in the introduction week and contact before arrival, cultural experiences in The Netherlands and at THU (negative and positive) and the adaptation to the new host environment.

The questions for the country tutor Asia and representative of the International Office at The Hague University included the following topics: the information flow to the exchange



students before arrival in The Netherlands, the tasks of the International Office and country tutor Asia to guide the exchange students in their process of adapting to THU, the support from the International Office and country tutor Asia.

The division for the chapters is as follows:

- Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework
- Chapter 2: Culture shock, Adjustment Challenges & Adaptability
- Chapter 3: The Preparation Phase at THU & Home Institution
- Chapter 4: Support during the Exchange
- Chapter 5: Comparison of Universities – Supervising Guest Students
- Chapter 6: Adaptation Process
- Chapter 7: Conclusions
- Chapter 8: Recommendations

### **Research Process**

Firstly, extensive quantitative research was done, in order to find a significant amount of background information on the topic of Asian exchange students at THU. Afterwards, the theoretical framework was set up in which the information found was put into context coherently. In order to find the information necessary for the theoretical framework, several books, websites and reports were read and consulted; extensive quantitative research was conducted. After the theoretical framework, the website of THU and the orientation period for exchange students were closely examined and described, in order to know what information THU gives to their exchange students. Furthermore, qualitative research was done by interviewing Asian exchange students at THU about the following topics: support from THU and home institution, information from THU in the introduction week and contact before arrival, cultural experiences in The Netherlands and at THU (negative and positive) and the adaptation to the new host environment. The country tutor for Asia and a representative of the International Office were also interviewed, in order to find out qualitative information about what kind of support and information THU gives to the exchange student, and how the students deal with the cultural differences at THU and generally in The Hague.

For the benchmarking of the research, the University of Twente, University of Groningen and Erasmus University Rotterdam, were examined on their exchange of information to their exchange and international students before and after they have arrived in The Netherlands. Furthermore, the reception and welcome of their exchange students were

researched as well, in terms of what kind of welcome they had for their exchange students and how their introduction period is organized, how they support their exchange students throughout their exchange. And to gather in-depth information about the information exchange of the Erasmus University to their exchange students, an interview was conducted by a representative of the International Office at Erasmus University.

After the information had been researched, a conclusion at the end of the research will summarize the findings. After the conclusion, several recommendations will be given for the Guest Student Office in order to adapt their information and support for Asian exchange students.

## **Field of Forces**

### **Internal Analysis – Stakeholders**

#### **Asian Exchange students**

The group of stakeholders that has a direct, and the most important influence on this research is the group of Asian exchange students of the ESCM academy at THU. The benefit of this research for them is going to be the recommendations to the Guest Student Office of the ESCM academy. They have difficulties in dealing with the different aspects of Dutch culture, the Dutch people and the Dutch way of teaching at the university. Therefore, the recommendations of this research will be very beneficial for them in order to prepare themselves better before coming to The Netherlands, and also to help them better adapt to their new environment. The recommendations will hopefully help in the adjustment processes of the Asian exchange students and decrease the amount of academic and emotional stress that the adaptation process requires from them.

#### **Guest Student Office – ESCM academy THU**

The Guest Student Office is the other party that has a benefit from this research: the Guest Student Office can use the recommendations of the research in order to positively adapt the information for the Asian exchange students and equip them better to the new cultural and social environment at THU and in The Netherlands. A part of this research is about analyzing the value of the information the Guest Student Office offers the incoming exchange students. More important is whether the Asian exchange students want anything added or altered in the information and guidance they receive from the Guest Student Office.

#### **Teachers/Lecturers of Asian exchange students at THU**

The teachers at THU who are involved with the Asian exchange students, in terms of giving classes and lectures, also benefit from this research. Some teachers are aware of the cultural differences in the education system between The Netherlands and Asia, and some are less aware of them. So in order for the Asian exchange students to experience less academic stress due to the differences in the education system, it is important for the teachers at THU to understand them and to meet the needs of the Asian exchange students in the classroom. The sixth chapter of the research involves the adaptation process for the Asian exchange students at THU: the obstacles and needs. One of the needs of the students is more understanding from the teachers at THU, understanding why they are generally more timid and less active than Dutch students in the classroom.

This can result, for example, in more direction and encouragement from the Dutch teachers to take part in discussions.

### **International Office THU & Home Institution**

Both the International Office at THU and the home institution of the Asian exchange students solely deal with the administrative matters of the exchange students: learning agreements, visas, applications, possible grants etc. However, since the International Office of both the THU and the home institution play a big part in the preparation phase of the exchange students, it could be more useful for the students if they could get more additional information and direction from the International Office. It could be useful for the incoming Asian exchange students, if the International Office of THU were to send them additional information about the Dutch culture, information about finding housing or direct them to useful parts of the THU website (which are important for incoming exchange students). Or the International Office can direct the students, if they have further questions, to a teacher at the ESCM academy that is involved with the welcome of exchange students, or a representative from the Guest Student Office. This can help the students in order for them to reduce any uncertainty and anxiety from the move to The Netherlands.

### **Home Institution Asian exchange students**

The home institution of the exchange students does not play a significant part in this research. However, since the Asian exchange students at THU do experience some form of culture shock, some more or less than others, it can be useful for the home institution to consider giving separate preparatory sessions for students going to countries which have very different cultures and education systems than Asian countries.

### **SWOT Analysis – Analyzing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats**

The following SWOT analysis will give an overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of this research.

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A significant amount of information is already available on the website of THU for potential exchange students.</li> <li>- Within THU and the ESCM academy,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is definitely room for more “cultural” information about The Netherlands on the website of THU, keeping in mind that there are cultural differences with exchange students, in this case Asian students.</li> </ul>

<p>there are teachers and other staff members Asian exchange students can go to for help when they feel they are having trouble with their new environment: the Guest Student Office, country tutor, Dutch culture supervisor, and maybe they also have a language buddy who is willing to help.</p> <p>- The exchange students get the class “Dutch Culture &amp; Society”. This can help in order for them to understand the Dutch culture and Dutch people, and it can help in decreasing the adaptation stress/difficulties.</p>	<p>- Many other universities have informative videos on their websites, to show potential exchange and international students their university (and the city in which the university is located) in a “fun” manner.</p>
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <p>- Making and including videos of the THU building, the students and lectures. Videos about The Hague, Spui (City Centre of The Hague) and the nightlife in The Hague will most likely be appreciated by exchange students who might not know anything about the environment in The Hague and THU. This will be good for them in the sense that they can get a “taste” of what THU and The Hague are like.</p> <p>- THU can incorporate more “practical” information in the introduction period/orientation programme for exchange students. This can include for example: transportation, locations of supermarkets in The Hague, insurance, general practitioners etc.</p> <p>- Making the introduction period for exchange students more “fun”: Let the student get a taste of the Dutch culture</p>	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <p>- A lack of practical information included in the introduction period for exchange students.</p> <p>- Some students can find an introduction period of a week too long. So it would be recommended to try to give as much information as possible in a short amount of time.</p>

through food, sports, parties, dinners, tours in The Hague etc. For this part of the introduction, it could be nice to invite a student organization, to let them get to know the “student life” in The Hague.	
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## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

*What are the general cultural differences between Eastern and Western cultures, using the collectivism & individualism and power distance dimensions by Hofstede?*

### 1.1 Cultural Categorization - The East and West

Eastern and Western cultures differ significantly from each other in the context of the set of values that they each have. Value orientations affect the way in which people interact with each other. Therefore, an understanding of intercultural value systems can identify differences and similarities between people from different cultures and can also help in interacting in an “appropriate” way with people from different cultures. In other words, when understanding intercultural value systems intercultural communication can be established.

To understand the cultural societal differences between an Eastern and Western culture, the two concepts of collectivism & individualism and power distance will be explained in order to get a view of the general differences between Eastern and Western cultures in these aspects.

### 1.2 Collectivism vs. Individualism

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch organizational psychologist who conducted significant research of the many influences of culture. The findings of his research and theoretical ideas are used worldwide in both psychology and management studies. **(The Hofstede Centre, 2013)**. Hofstede (2005) defines the two dimensions as follows: *“Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family”* *“Collectivism, as its opposite, pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty”*. **(Hofstede, 2005)**.

#### 1.2.1 Collectivism

In a society which is considered “collective”, the interests of the group prevail over those of an individual. In a collective society there is a strong sense of belonging to a group. The most important group one belongs to in a collective society is the family. However, in this aspect it should be noted that the “family” in a collective society not only consists of

the parents and children, but also grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins. This is called the “extended family”. A child growing up in an extended family in a collectivist society, naturally learns to think of themselves as part of a “we”-group; the “we” group is also called in-group. The other people in a collectivist society belong to a “they” group, of which there are many, and are distinct from the “we” group. Friendships in these types of societies are also predetermined by the group one belongs to. **(Hofstede, 2005)**. The in-group one belongs to in a collective society makes up the largest part of one’s identity, and is also the individuals’ only protection against the hardships of life. The individual should not only owe lifelong loyalty to their in-group, but they are also expected to do so by their group; breaking this loyalty to one’s group is one of the worst things a person can do. Between the person and the in-group a mutual dependence relationship develops which is both practical and psychological. **(Hofstede, 2005)**. Maintaining harmony is one of the key values in a collectivist society, and confrontations should always be avoided.

Examples of countries where the society is considered collective are among others: China, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. These countries score low on the Individualism Index.

### 1.2.2 Individualism

In an individualist society the interests of the individual prevails over the interests of a group. As opposed to the collectivist society where the individual sees him/herself a part of a group, in the individualist society the individual sees him/herself as an individual, not bound to any group. In individualist societies most individuals are part of a nuclear family, a family which consists of two parents and other children. Other relatives are not directly a part of the family, live elsewhere and are rarely seen. **(Hofstede, 2005)**. Children from nuclear families, as they grow up, learn to think and see themselves as “I” and their “I” is different from other people’s “I” ’s. In an individualist society the person is not supposed to be either practically or psychologically dependent on a group. **(Hofstede, 2005)**. In an individualist society a person is supposed to be independent and able to look after him/herself. An independent self is encouraged in the individualist society.

Examples of countries where the society is considered individualist are among others: United States, Canada, The Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Australia, Sweden, Germany, Great Britain and France. These countries score relatively high on the Individualism Index.



### **1.3 Power Distance**

Inequality exists in almost every culture and can occur in areas such as prestige, wealth, power, human rights and technology. Power distance is defined by Hofstede (2005) as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”. However, there are societies which have less or more accentuation on the inequality between families, friendships and organizations. Thus, power distance can be divided into two categories: small and large power distance. In a small power distance culture, inequalities among people should be minimized and interdependence should exist between less and more powerful people. On the contrary, in large power distance cultures inequalities between people are both expected and desired. The less powerful people should be dependent on the more powerful people. **(Neuliep, 2009).**

#### **1.3.1 Power distance: East vs. West**

In the West, or in Western cultures such as American or European cultures, there usually exists small power distance in society. This can be seen in the family, in schools and in the workplace. In the family, family members are generally treated as equals and familial decisions are reached democratically. In schools, teachers expect students to show initiative, have a certain degree of interaction with their students and teachers also expect to be challenged by their students. In the workplace, there is usually not much hierarchy present, decentralization is favored and subordinates participate in decision-making. **(Neuliep, 2009).** Some of the countries with small power distance cultures are among others: Austria, Denmark, Israel, Switzerland, Australia, United States, The Netherlands, Belgium and Finland.

On the contrary, in the East, most of the countries have large power distance cultures. The large power distance can be seen in the family, at school and in the workplace. In the family there is usually a typical hierarchical order, where the father rules authoritatively, followed by the eldest son and further moving down the ladder by age and sex. **(Neuliep, 2009).** Children are expected to be obedient and respectful towards their parents. This is the same case in schools, children are expected to treat teachers with the same respect and honor as they do their parents. Students who disobey their teachers can be punished severely. In the workplace, power is usually centralized and there is unequal treatment of bosses and subordinates. **(Neuliep, 2009).** Some of the countries with large power distance cultures include: Malaysia, China, Mexico, Philippines, South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong.

## Chapter 2: Culture shock, Adjustment Challenges & Adaptability

### 2.1 Culture Shock!

When people move to a country with another culture, they take with them the values, beliefs, customs and behaviors of their old culture. It happens often, depending on the degree of similarity between the old and new culture, the values, beliefs, customs and behaviors of the native culture clash with those of the new culture. **(Ye, 2006)**. This results in disorientation, misunderstandings, conflict, stress and anxiety. This phenomenon is what's called *culture shock*. **(Neuliep, 2009)**. Culture shock is a multifaceted experience whereby one experiences various stressors, caused by coming into contact with a culture different from one's own. Culture shock stems from the challenges associated with new cultural surroundings, in addition to the loss of a familiar cultural environment. **(Neuliep, 2009)**. There are various models that describe the stages of culture shock, but most models describe the process curvilinearly or as the "U-curve". The U-curve describes culture shock as feelings of optimism and positivity in the beginning, afterwards these feelings begin to change into feelings of frustration, tension and anxiety as individuals might not be able to interact effectively with their new environment. After the second stage people begin to develop strategies to be able to resolve conflict, the confidence level is restored and lastly some level of adaptation to the new culture is achieved. **(Neuliep, 2009)**.

#### 2.1.1 Managing culture shock

It will be likely one experiences culture shock to some extent when coming into contact with a culture different from one's own. However, the degree of culture shock experienced varies significantly for people. But, it has to be said that there are several ways to manage culture shock and decrease its impacts.

- Study the host culture: Try to gain as much information as possible about the new culture and its people. Think about books, the internet, folders/guides from travel agencies, interview people who have been there for an extended period of time etc.
- Study the Local environment: Study how the local culture is. Try to gain information about the day-to-day activities. Examples of these activities are: look where local supermarkets are, how to fill prescriptions, where a doctor or hospital is located and how the transportation system operates.

- Basic Verbal and Nonverbal language skills: Familiarize yourself with basic verbal skills such as greeting or frequently used phrases. Also, try to learn about nonverbal mannerisms and expectations for time, personal space, paralanguage (pitch, intonation, volume etc.), kinesics (body language), haptics (the use of touch in communication) etc.
- Develop Intercultural Relationships: Developing intercultural relationships with nationals can inform one about the host culture on a more “in-depth” level. No other person knows more about one’s culture than a national. Subsequently, a national can be of immense help in understanding the people and the culture.
- Maintaining an Intrapersonal Social Network: It can be stressful living in a different environment, with different people and a different culture. However, maintaining intrapersonal social relationships can help one in relieving stress experienced from the difference in environment.
- Assume the Principle of difference: Another culture will always be different from one’s own. Know that all verbal and nonverbal messages encoded and decoded, are filtered through one’s own cultural, microcultural, environmental, sociorelational and perceptual filters.
- Anticipate failure events: How well one may prepare him/herself, there are moments where one can be unsuccessful at accomplishing one’s goals. There may be times where one may engage in acts that are unintentional or incorrectly executed according to different (cultural) situations.

**(Neuliep, 2009)**

It is important for students to be able to “manage” culture shock, as described above. For the Asian exchange students coming to THU to study, it is important to prepare oneself for the cultural differences between one’s own country and The Netherlands. Once the person has prepared well in advance, by the ways described above, the level of culture shock perceived, can be decreased significantly.

## **2.2 Adjustment Challenges**

Going abroad for a significant period of time often requires adjustment, and can be quite a stressful period of time. However, the adjustment challenges might be significantly higher for Asians, due to the relatively high difference in culture **(Wang, 2011)**. The degree of stress experienced also depends on the similarity of the two cultures; the culture of the native and the host culture. **(Ye, 2006)**. Research suggests that international students from collectivist backgrounds may experience lower levels of life satisfaction and higher

levels of anxiety than international students from individualist cultures (**Sam, 2001; Surdam & Collins, 1984**). Following are several main stressors that Asian students might need to cope with during a period abroad:

Change in Diet: Many people experience a change in diet patterns when going abroad. Research has shown that eating the food from one's own culture, while being abroad, endows the native of feelings of comfort and safety, while adjusting to unfamiliar tastes of types of food from the host culture (**Brown, Edwards, & Hartwell, 2009; Furukawa, 1997**). The difference in food of Asians is dramatically different from food in The Netherlands, and some international students find it quite hard to adapt to it. (**Kikuchi, 2013**).

Language Barrier: The most obvious adjustment and stressor is the language. A study in the United States pointed out that Asian students are expected to have a language barrier when they first arrive in the United States; Asians may have even greater language barriers in particular. (**Wang, 2011**). Asian languages are often spoken and written in a different manner than many European and American languages, this can cause an Asian to have more difficulty with learning another language, such as English.

Many students are not well adapted to the language of the host country, so it may be difficult for students when situations occur where an understanding of the language of the host country is needed. The Dutch language is obviously very different from an Asian language, this may cause problems for students in certain situations. Examples of these situations are: reading the ingredients from the packaging of foods in the supermarket (where the ingredients are only listed in Dutch), filling out Dutch forms in banks and getting money from a Dutch ATM machine (the instructions are in Dutch). (**Lee; Moon, 2013**).

Academic Stress: The language barrier that Asians students generally have may reflect itself in stress on the academic level as well. The educational system in the East may differ in various ways from the Western educational system. Differences are for example in administrative procedures (course registration, exam application etc.), but also the expectations of teachers to participate in discussions with fellow students. (**Wang, 2011**). Asian students would like to get more understanding from teachers, in their unfamiliarity with the Dutch teaching system. They would want teachers to understand the differences in teaching system and would want the teachers to encourage them for more active in-class participation. (**Kikuchi, 2013**).

Perceived Discrimination: Research indicated that in the United States ethnic and racial discrimination is still noticeable. (**Biasco, Goodwin, & Vitale, 2001; Rankin & Reason, 2005**). Discrimination also still occurs in The Netherlands, however not on a very noticeable level. In other words there are problems every now and then with the discrimination of Asians, however the size is limited. (**“Verslag discussieavond discriminatie Chinese Nederlanders”, n.d.**). One of the interviewees has mentioned that she did get to hear racial comments behind her back a few times, in The Netherlands (**Park, 2013**).

### **2.3 Adaptability**

The adaptability of international/exchange students to the host culture is one of the research objects, when researching about difficulties of foreign students, whether they are exchange or international students. One of the most important factors that play a significant role in the experience of stress by international and exchange students is the adaptability to the host culture. (**Redmond, 2000**). In the research by Redmond (2000), the distance between the culture of the student and the culture of the United States has been measured by the dimensions of Hofstede. This difference in culture reflects the amount of stress experienced, how the students deal with it and their intercultural competence (ICC). Intercultural competence includes the following: language skills, adaptability, social decentralization (empathy), communicative effectiveness, social integration and knowledge about the host culture. The students who indicated to possess adaptability to the host culture and empathy, experienced less stress. Dealing with stress seemed to be easier when the students have adaptability and communicative effectiveness. (**Mikkers, 2008**).

This theory seems to apply to the interviewees for this research: the students who adapted better to the Dutch environment and at THU (**Yu, Lee & Moon, 2013**) had indicated the following:

- Less problems in adapting to the Dutch food and weather.
- Comfortable in English language skills.
- Comfortable with the differences in approaching lecturers in The Netherlands, this is due to the power distance differences at school between teachers and students in Asia and The Netherlands.
- Comfortable in working with a group with Dutch students for projects.

Following are quotes from students who adapted more easily to the Dutch culture and environment, thus experiencing less stress:

*"I am quite comfortable and easygoing when it comes to cultural differences in general, I guess I am just more open towards it. It could also partly be because I have lived abroad for some years when I was younger; I lived in a country where the national language was English."* **(Yu, see appendix 4)**

*"I like the food in The Netherlands, especially the Dutch cheese and other dairy products. I also like the fresh baked bread from the supermarkets."* **(Moon, see appendix 5)**

The students who indicated to have problems in adapting to the Dutch culture and environment, and adapting to THU indicated the following:

- Dislike for certain types of Dutch food and looking for places where to find food from one's own country and culture.
- Problems with communicating and expressing oneself in the English language, hereby causing inner frustration with oneself.
- Problems in adapting to the new environment such as the weather, drinking water, new living environment.

**(Lee, Kikuchi & Park, 2013)**

Following are quotes from students who had more problems in adapting to the Dutch culture and environment, thus experiencing stress and even health related problems:

*"Some types of Dutch food are nice, but overall I don't really like eating the Dutch food; I miss the food from home (Japan). Japanese food is very expensive in The Netherlands, back home (in Japan) the food costs three to four times less than here."* **(Kikuchi, see appendix 3)**

*"My health condition seemed to have decreased since coming to The Netherlands. I think it's because of the difference in atmosphere...the environment and atmosphere is very different from Asia, as well as the food, drinking water and weather. I think I will need to go to the doctor for a check-up, maybe to get prescriptions."* **(Park, see appendix 7)**

### Chapter 3: The Preparation Phase at THU & Home Institution

*What information was provided to the Asian guest students by THU and by their home institution?*

Every academic year, The Hague University welcomes approximately 400 exchange students from over 40 nationalities. The academic year is divided in two semesters: the first semester starts in September and the second semester starts at the end of January. With every semester there are exchange students coming to The Hague University to study. Now, going abroad to study, it is essential to understand the culture in the respective country one is going to study. The information provided to Asian guest students will be assessed in this chapter: Firstly, the information provided by The Hague University *before* arrival; secondly, the information provided by The Hague University *upon* arrival; and lastly, the information and support provided by the home institution before arrival to The Netherlands. The following information will be based only on the Asian guest students of the ESCM academy within THU and the academic year 2013-2014.

#### **3.1 Information provided by The Hague University: Before arrival**

Before arrival to The Netherlands, the students will find most answers through the website of The Hague University: [www.thehagueuniversity.com](http://www.thehagueuniversity.com). On the website of THU, the students will also find e-mail addresses available, to be able to contact THU.

##### **3.1.1 THU Website**

The THU website provides a variety of information, for exchange students in general, to find their way: from application to study at THU to financial matters and finding housing in and around The Hague. The website informs international students about the possible course/module choices, how to apply for THU and the documents necessary, the different facilities available on campus, a FAQ (frequently asked questions) for exchange students which deals with information about the exchange programs, doctors on campus, insurance and much more. For Chinese students, this information is also available in Chinese.

The International Office and Students Housing Office of THU offer help to both guest and international students in getting settled in The Netherlands.

### International Office

The International Office handles all the practical matters which international students need to deal with, such as visas, (residence) permits, subsidies/grants etc. **(The Hague University of Applied Sciences, 2013)**

Student Housing Office: The Student Housing Office helps international students in finding suitable and affordable accommodation in and around The Hague, whether near campus or on the private market.

**(The Hague University of Applied Sciences, 2013)**

### ***3.2 Information provided by The Hague University: Upon arrival***

After the exchange students arrived in The Netherlands, they got an introduction week by THU. In this week the students were introduced to the school, their country tutor and Dutch Culture supervisor, and had a small introduction to the Dutch culture in general. The *Orientation Programme for guest students* was in January: from January 20<sup>th</sup> until January 24<sup>th</sup> (2014). The following will be a short summary of the introduction period for the guest students in January 2014. This introduction period was for the incoming exchange students (2013-2014) from the ESCM academy.

Monday January 20: The students were welcomed, given a tour of the building, registered with the International Office and met with their Dutch Culture & Society supervisor, who took them on a boat trip in The Hague. Furthermore, they had a lunch and information market in the HEBO canteen where they could sample some typical Dutch culinary delights and get information about student organizations and other facilities available on THU.

Tuesday January 21: The students were introduced to THU and the ESCM academy, they were divided according to their country and introduced to their country-tutor. The guest students got an introduction to "The Globetrotter", the electronic newsletter on internationalization at the Academy of European Studies & Communication Management. The newsletter is published twice a year and is targeted at Dutch and foreign students of the Academy. **(The Hague University of Applied Sciences, 2013)**. The students got a lecture by a representative of the Dutch police force to have a safe and enjoyable stay in The Netherlands. ACCESS in co-operation with the Xpat Desk of The Hague Hospitality Centre, gave a session about the City of The Hague. There was also an introduction



session for the module Dutch Culture and Society. Afterwards, the students had a meeting with their country-tutor and lastly played the game “Intercultural Games: Mission Impossible”; where they worked together with home students and carried out fun activities together. **(The Hague University of Applied Sciences, 2013).**

Wednesday January 22: On Wednesday, the guest students had information sessions about the subjects, the language courses, Blackboard, students e-mail etc. Another meeting with the country- tutor was scheduled around the afternoon. In the case of students who were interested in following classes by the IBMS programme, they could attend another information session about this after the meeting with the country-tutor.

Thursday January 23: The students confirmed registration for the courses chosen to follow. Later in the afternoon, there was a HEBOS party starting at 21:00. HEBOS is the student organization by the ESCM academy.

Friday January 24: Another opportunity was available to confirm course registration and check timetables.

### ***3.3 Preparation by the home institution of the Asian students***

Supervisor/ Contactperson with THU: The students going on exchange will get a supervisor appointed. Subsequently, the supervisor will inform the student about the practical side of the exchange which, among other things, include: general information about The Hague University, the modules to choose from at THU, accommodation etc. The supervisor will generally also arrange the paperwork with the student which has to be sent to the International Office at The Hague University. This person will also be the first contact person for the exchange student at THU. This contact person usually has contact with the country tutor Asia at THU, for sending documents, student profiles and grade transcripts to THU. **(Coq, 2014)**

Reports of previous THU exchange students: Often, the home institution of the exchange students has students who previously went to THU as exchange students. Usually, those students have to write a report about their experiences in The Netherlands and at THU, to be able to complete the exchange and get the full credits. A lot of potential exchange students look into those reports since it provides useful insights into how other students have experienced THU and living in The Netherlands. **(Yu, Moon, & Lee, 2014)**

Preparatory Session at Home University:

At the home institution there is a “Preparatory Session” organized for all students going abroad for an exchange. This preparatory session is not organized based on which continent or country the students are going to, rather it is a session for *all* students regardless of the country they are going to. In this session representatives of the home institution give information about what to prepare before the exchange, what documents to take care of, to look out for any cultural differences and to look after themselves and be careful. **(Moon & Park, 2014)**

International Office at Home Institution:

All of the Asian students, who were interviewed, gave the response that the International Office at their home institution solely dealt with arranging and preparing the administrative matters needed for the exchange. This means that the International Office at the home institution dealt with the documents including: learning agreements, possible grants, visas, application to THU etc.

## Chapter 4: Support during the Exchange

### **4.1 Support from THU/ESCM Academy**

There are several ways in how The Hague University and the ESCM academy supports exchange students. Previously, it has been said that there is an introduction week organized for exchange students to get them familiarized with the university and The Hague. (**“Orientation Programme”, 2014**).

#### **Country tutor**

During the introduction week the exchange students meet with their country tutor, the tasks of a country tutor are welcoming the students in their orientation period, giving them general information about the THU, The Hague and things the students should be aware of during their stay in The Netherlands. The country tutor for Asia will supervise the Asian exchange students during their exchange. The country tutor gives the students general information which includes: how to move around town, how to open a bank account and information about what they should be aware of while they're here. The students can always go the country tutor for any kind of help if needed. However, the country tutor mainly deals in contact with the home institution of the exchange students, which is mainly prior to coming to THU and mostly for administrative matters. (**Coq, 2014**).

#### **Guest Student Office**

A lot of information goes through the exchange student office, where representatives will help the students with everything school-related, but also non-school related. If exchange students have questions about the university, the study, subjects, schedules, exams or anything else; they can go to the guest student office for help. If they have questions about how to find their way in living in The Hague, they can also go to the guest student office. The guest student office is usually the first point of contact for just about everything for incoming exchange students. Besides the Guest Students Office, the exchange students have other options for help when needed: the International Office, the Dutch Culture supervisor and a language buddy. (**“Orientation Programme”, 2014**). A language buddy is a Dutch student who helps an exchange student with the Dutch language, in return the Dutch student gets ECTS credits.

#### ***4.2 Support from the Home institution, family and social circle back home***

Of course the students can always e-mail the exchange supervisor of the home institution for any kind of support, or even just to give them an update every now and then of how the exchange is proceeding. The support the home institution gives is usually prior to the exchange, where the home institution, and mainly the exchange supervisor, provides the student with all the necessary information before departure. However, it has become clear during the interviews that the Asian exchange students generally do not keep in touch with their home institution after they've started with their exchange period. They mostly keep in touch with their families, close friends and class mates from the home institution. (Yu, Moon & Kikuchi et al., 2013). According to the interviewees, they also derive a lot of support from their family and social circle back home, by frequently keeping in touch with them.

#### ***4.3 Strong Network amongst the Asian exchange students at THU***

The Asian exchange students have a strong network amongst themselves. This is partly due to the fact that some Asian exchange students come from the same country in Asia, this develops a feeling of familiarity and closeness, which further develops a bond of friendship. However, there may be students who are also from the same university in the home country, therefore this creates a bond as well. Some of them even get the e-mail address from students who are from the same university, studying at THU, from their home institution in order to contact them. (Park & Kikuchi, 2014)

Apart from the fact that some students might be from the same country, there is also the fact that the Asian students know from one another that they are from the same area: East-Asia. In the introduction week (organized by THU) this makes them further drawn to each other, knowing that they share the same cultural values and can derive support by one another. (Yu, 2014)

## **Chapter 5: Comparison of Universities – Supervising/Informing Guest Students**

*Benchmarking: How is the information exchange of other universities to their guest students?*

### **5.1 University of Twente**

The University has a general and faculty “Kick-In” introduction period for exchange and international students. And before the international and exchange students arrive to The Netherlands, they get a practical guide “International Student Handbook”, which is for both international and exchange students coming to the University of Twente to study.

#### “Kick-In” introduction Period:

The “Kick-In” is an introduction period for international and exchange students to get them familiarized with the University of Twente and the city Enschede (where the university is located). The Kick-In is organized in order to familiarize exchange and international students with fellow students and sports- and cultural organizations on the campus. During the Kick-in introduction days there is a formality market where arranging formalities can be arranged regarding residence permit, application for bank account and registration at the municipality. The first part of the Kick-In deals with administrative matters and documents related to the university and living in The Netherlands. The second part of the Kick-In is more informal and includes a tour of the campus, a tour of the city Enschede and socializing with fellow students.

#### International Student Handbook:

The “International Student Handbook: A Practical Guide” is a booklet consisting of approximately 50 pages, about all the issues exchange and international students need to deal with before arrival to The Netherlands, upon arrival, during their stay and upon departure. The guide includes the following information: what to do before arrival (administrative matters), what to do upon arrival (Kick-In period, enrollment, registration etc.), information about the university and university campus, information about Enschede (shopping locations, where to rent bikes, public transportation etc.), general information about the Netherlands (climate, environment, culture, cultural and educational differences etc.), information about support services of university (student counseling service, student affairs, learning Dutch etc.) and lastly, what to arrange before departure. The guide is very step-by-step arranged, very chronological, so it's easier for potential exchange and

international students to process the information and know what to do before they come here.

#### Videos:

The University of Twente also had a lot of videos included on their website. These videos incorporate information about the academies, campus, studies etc. However, there are also less “academic” videos like videos about the university orchestra, student organizations etc. Of course there is also a video about international and exchange students. This video features interviews of international and exchange students and their opinions of the university, about student life in Groningen, about the Dutch culture, about the (possible) differences in teaching and educational system with their home country and The Netherlands etc.

### **5.2 Erasmus University**

#### Website:

The Erasmus University website includes a lot of general information for incoming exchange students, this is mostly information about the procedures before coming to The Netherlands. This information includes: application to the university, immigration procedures, information about housing, information about how to arrange finances and arranging health insurance. **(Erasmus University, 2014)**

#### Videos:

The Erasmus University website also includes a lot of informative videos about finding housing, students associations, how to travel from Schiphol to Woudestein (Location Erasmus University) and student support services. These videos are fun to watch for incoming students because with the help of these videos they can create a better image of the university and the surroundings/environment in The Netherlands. These videos are helpful in getting a better visual image of the information that is already available on the Erasmus website. **(Erasmus Student Service Centre, 2014).**

#### Introduction Period incoming Exchange Students:

The exchange students get a significant amount of practical information, upon arrival in Rotterdam. This practical information is given in several sessions at the university, divided over one week. The information includes: information about housing, modules and enrolling for classes, the Erasmus Student Service Centre, the different facilities available

on campus for students (sports facilities, library etc.), exam regulations and exam registration, information about the academy, the electronic learning environment, a tour of the campus.

A general information session is also included with information about the safety in Rotterdam, how and where to rent a bike and where the open-air market is. In other words, there is an informative session about life in Rotterdam; places to visit and events interesting for foreign as well as Dutch students. **(Erasmus Social Sciences International Office, 2014).**

#### Food Evening:

This is an event organized by the Erasmus University for their exchange students. This is an informal event where exchange students can make food from their countries, and the exchange students can taste each others' food and socialize. This takes place in a local café in Rotterdam, and is organized twice a year (each every semester).

### **5.3 University of Groningen**

#### Welcoming Ceremony:

The University of Groningen arranges an official "Welcoming Ceremony" for new international and exchange students, in the beginning of every semester (August & January). One the day of the welcome ceremony speeches by the mayor of Groningen, Rector Magnificus and other representatives of the university will be given. Furthermore, there will also be an information market, lunch and workshops about Dutch culture and education. Attending the welcoming ceremony will help in arranging a lot of practical and legal matters in one day. The programme includes a university fair featuring information on social, cultural, language, sports, housing office, computer and other facilities. Participants will be: City Hall, AON health insurance, Immigration Authorities and many more. **(Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2013)**

#### Central Introduction Week:

The central introduction week is an introduction period organized by ESN Groningen (Erasmus Student Network Groningen; a student organization for all international and exchange students in Groningen) which includes cultural activities, tours of the city, sports, parties and dinners. This is an excellent period to meet fellow students and to socialize with them.

Website:

The website of the University of Groningen incorporates a lot of information for incoming international and exchange students. For example a factsheet about the university, a practical handbook and a “Welcome to Groningen” handbook which includes information about what to do before and upon arrival, during your stay and what to do upon departure. This includes the administrative matters, general information about the Dutch culture and Dutch education system, places to shop in Groningen, student organizations etc. There is also an A-Z which includes just about everything of the University of Groningen: The academies, facilities, campus information etc.

Student Support Groups:

The Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in The Netherlands has a support programme set up for exchange and international students, aiming at helping these students academically. This weekly group will help in becoming a successful student abroad. The group is intended for students who would like to reflect on their study habits and share experiences with other international/exchange students. Every week a study plan is made and discussed with fellow students. **(Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2013).**

**5.4 Comparison with THU**

- Just like all the universities of Twente, Groningen and Erasmus, THU has an introduction period, especially organized for exchange students.
- THU does not have many video's on their website. It could be an idea to make a video where exchange students are interviewed about THU, the educational system of THU, life in The Hague and in The Netherlands, about the interaction with teachers and social interaction with other exchange students or Dutch students. It will be interesting for a “potential exchange student” to watch a video like this, since it will give the views of another exchange student.
- It would be a good idea for THU to make a “handbook” like the University of Twente has for their international and exchange students. It is a handy step-by-step guide about what to arrange for the exchange. Everything is included from application to the culture in The Netherlands.
- THU does not have a “Food Evening” organized especially for exchange students. However, this would also be a good idea to do. Maybe THU can organize this for the



exchange, international and Dutch students altogether. This would make for a good opportunity to socialize and interact on a more informal level.

## Chapter 6: Adaptation Process

*How is the adaptation process for the Asian guest students in The Netherlands and at THU?*

### 6.1 General obstacles

Asian students are very much capable of taking care of themselves in The Netherlands and subsequently also at THU (**Coq, 2014**), so there are not many “big” obstacles that the Asian exchange students need to deal with. However, there are situations in which Asian exchange students welcome a “helping hand”. Thus, some of those situations are the following:

#### - More information about daily living circumstances

Through the in-depth interviews with the students, it has become clear that the students get a lot of information about the university and how to find their way in the university, especially in the introduction week. However, there is not much information given about how to *live* in The Hague. In other words: where the supermarkets and pharmacies are, where one can find a doctor/hospital, how the transportation works etc. (**Kikuchi & Yu, 2013**).

#### - Asian exchange students like to *experience* the Dutch culture

Most Asian exchange students, if not all of them, follow the module “Dutch Culture & Society”. However this module gives a broad overview of the Dutch culture, the students want to really experience different facets of the Dutch culture. It’s similar to being taught a certain profession at school which is mostly theory-based and an internship where the learned theory can put into practice, and usually one learns more when actually applying the theory in practice. So, students do not only want to read and learn about what Dutch culture and Dutch people are like in classes, but they want to be “exposed” to and experience Dutch culture, and also interact with Dutch people. (**Park & Lee, 2014**)

#### - Understanding from lecturers and professors

Many Asian students are more timid and reluctant to take part in in-class discussion, as opposed to many Dutch students. This is a part of the Asian culture as mentioned previously. Power distance also plays a big role at school: Asian students are simply more obedient in this aspect and are not taught to “question” the teacher’s opinion and voice

out their own, hereby creating a discussion. Asian students would like more understanding from their teachers in this aspect. **(Kikuchi, 2014)**

**- The language barrier: English and Dutch**

Most Asian exchange students can speak English to a certain level, however it has been shown through the in-depth interviews that some students find it difficult in expressing themselves in the English language. However, even more difficult is it for them to understand Dutch, let alone express themselves in the Dutch language. **(Yu, Kikuchi, Lee & Park, 2014)**

**- The difference in Power Distance at School**

As has already been explained before, there is a significant difference in power distance between Asian countries and The Netherlands. It has been shown through the interviews that many of the Asian exchange students sometimes have difficulties in interacting with the teachers and lecturers at THU. **(Yu & Kikuchi, 2014)** However, this is mostly in the beginning of the exchange. The students explained that later on during the course of their exchange, they have found it easier to interact with the teachers at THU on a more informal level. **(Park, 2014)**

**- A very individual aspect in The Netherlands**

The Netherlands is a very individual country, whereas most Asian countries are collectivist. The interviewees have mentioned that they feel that the atmosphere in The Netherlands is very independent and individualist. In their home country the atmosphere is not as individualist as here in The Netherlands. However, it has to be mentioned that on the school level, it is more individualistic than in society in general in Korea. **(Yu & Lee, 2014)**

## **6.2 Needs**

In the previous section of this chapter, it has become clear that there are obstacles Asian exchange students need to deal with during their exchange at THU. However, these obstacles are very small in comparison to the overall change in environment for these exchange students. With a little help from THU, these obstacles can be overcome easily, or at least be significantly decreased. Following are the needs of Asian exchange students at THU:

### **- Access of information about daily living circumstances in The Netherlands**

A lot of Asian exchange students would like to get more information about the practical side of day-to-day living situations. These include for example: where to find supermarkets for buying groceries, information about the public transport and information about where doctors/hospitals are in case of illness. Most of the information THU offers and gives the students applies mostly to the university. However since an exchange is a drastic change in environment, it helps in getting information about the environment too, which in most situation can only be accessed upon arrival.

### **-Experiencing the Dutch culture**

The research has also shown that most Asian students would like to experience the Dutch culture, instead of only reading about it in books or being taught about it in lectures. In the case of experiencing the Dutch culture, this can be achieved through the following examples: introducing the students to various Dutch foods, Dutch art and sightseeing in various places in The Netherlands and watching Dutch movies. In one of the interviews, a student pointed out that he wanted to know more about Dutch art, since he was interested in it, so he looked it up on the internet. But it would be even more fun, if there was someone prepared to provide him information about museums or cinema's to visit.

### **- Interaction with Dutch students from THU**

The Asian exchange students have pointed out that most of them have a strong network amongst themselves. So, in most cases, information is transmitted to one another and they seek help within their network first if any problems may occur. However, students would also like to have more contact with Dutch students and socialize with them apart from only school-related work. This can be achieved through a "buddy"-system, where one (or more) Dutch student(s) accompany Asian students during their time in The Netherlands, through doing various activities with them.

**- Direction from lecturers and professors**

Many Asian students are very obedient and timid in the classroom, which means they are very reluctant to voice out their opinions in a group discussion, and this is usually what most Dutch (western) teachers want. To help the Asian students in this aspect, to become more active in the classroom and to participate with in-class discussions, teachers can direct a question to a student. This because when a question is directly asked to an Asian student, the student is more likely to voice out his/her opinion than when the discussion is left to the group.

**- Support with the Dutch language**

As mentioned above, there are some institutions in The Netherlands where you have to be able to understand the Dutch language in order to get the desired result. For example when filling out forms in banks or at ATM machines, there is a need to understand a bit of Dutch. A specific day could be organized to help Asian students with opening a bank account, get registered with a general practitioner and help them to get an understanding of how Dutch ATM machines work.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

Every year there are many exchange students, from all parts of the world, coming to The Hague University to study. These exchange students have to deal with a lot of changes in their environment; they go from a familiar daily environment to an environment which is completely unknown. On top of the environmental changes, there are also dramatic changes in the social environment; suddenly they have their family and friends away from them and they are feeling like they have to begin from scratch in making new friends. In some cases, this change in environment is so heavy and different from what they are used to, it can cause a culture shock: a multifaceted experience whereby one experiences various stressors, caused by coming into contact with a culture different from one's own. Culture shock stems from the challenges associated with new cultural surroundings, in addition to the loss of a familiar cultural environment. **(Neuliep, 2009).**

However, during the course of this research and through in-depth interviews with Asian exchange students, a representative from the International Office and the country tutor for Asia, it has become clear that some Asian exchange students experience a culture shock, and some do not. This depends on the preparation of the student and their ability to adapt to new cultures and environments. **(Redmond, 2000).** This is because of a good preparation before coming to The Netherlands and useful information from The Hague University upon arrival through an introduction week, especially organized for incoming exchange students.

Although the students may not really experience a very severe culture shock, there are a few minor problems that do occur during their exchange. Some of those difficulties are related to the Dutch culture and some of them are not.

The difficulties related to the culture are the following:

- Relatively low active participation in in-class discussion: This due to the more timid and reluctant Asian attitude at the school level, but also because of insecurities about the English and Dutch language.
- Not much social contact with other Dutch students at THU.
- The difference in power distance makes the students a bit confused on how to interact with the Dutch teachers, because they are not used to interact informal with teachers.

Apart from the difficulties related to the differences in culture, there are the difficulties related to moving to another country, which means a difference in the familiar

environment. The research shows that the Asian exchange students also have some difficulties, related to the day-to-day living situations, which are for example: finding grocery stores, finding out where a hospital or general practitioner is or how the Dutch public transportation systems work.

Lastly, it can be concluded that there are obstacles Asian exchange students have to deal with, during their exchange at The Hague University in The Netherlands. The obstacles the students have are both related to daily life and differences related to the culture, academically as well as socially. However, those difficulties can be overcome with some extra help and support from lecturers and professors.

## Chapter 8: Recommendations

The goal of this research is to find out what the difficulties/obstacles of Asian exchange students at THU are and give recommendations to the Guest Students Office, in order to accommodate these students better in their new environment.

The following recommendations are derived from the research:

**- Giving the Asian exchange students more practical information about living in The Netherlands during the introduction week.**

This includes information about the daily living circumstances: whereabouts of supermarkets, pharmacies, information about doctors/hospitals/general practitioners, and information about the transportation system. The research shows that the Asian exchange students at THU need a better preparation for their daily life in The Hague. A lot of the students in the in-depth interviews mentioned there is a need for more practical information from the university, whether it would be in the form of a lecture/session or just information on paper. (Moon, Yu & Kikuchi et al., 2013).

**- Setting up a “buddy system”: A Dutch students supervises a group of Asian students.**

This simply means that a Dutch student (or an international student who has lived in the Netherlands for a significant amount of time) will ‘supervise’ a group of Asian students in The Hague University. Also, ‘supervising’ is meant in terms of advising the students with school-related work, but also doing fun activities with them. And fun activities can be everything, for example taking the students to the local cinema, having a ‘typical Dutch’ dinner with them or taking them to the national museum. (Yu, 2013).

It has been mentioned before that Asian exchange students would like to really experience several facets of the Dutch culture and interact with other Dutch students. With this buddy system set up in THU, this will be possible for the exchange students when a Dutch student is assigned to a group of Asian exchange students. A Dutch student might not sign up to be a ‘buddy’ out of own free will and for the sacrificing of their time, so it would be possible to ‘reward’ Dutch students with extra ECTS points. With the ‘buddy’-system there are already two needs of Asian students covered: the first is the experiencing of Dutch culture and the second is the social contact with other Dutch students. (Moon, Yu & Kikuchi et al., 2013).



Moreover, the exchange students would like to establish social relationships with Dutch students. Since going abroad to study, it would be nice for them to establish social relationships with fellow students. This will be beneficial for both the Asian exchange students and the Dutch students for several reasons:

- The Asian exchange students adapt more quickly to the new environment, thus decreasing any stress that comes with the change in environment.
- The Asian exchange students learn about the Dutch culture by a Dutch national.
- The Dutch students have opportunities to learn about different cultures and expand their horizons.

**(Wang, 2011).**

**- Incorporating a short 'crash-course' Dutch for Asian exchange students.**

Incorporating the Dutch language as a course for international or Asian exchange students helps them in getting an understanding of the Dutch language, which is an essential part of culture. Not only will they be more familiarized with the Dutch language, but they will also be able to know 'basic' Dutch which can be very helpful during their stay in The Netherlands. The students will know some common and basic phrases that can be used in everyday life. Furthermore, a course Dutch will help students to feel more secure and as a result stress by inexperience in the language of the host country can be reduced. **(Mikkers, 2008).**

**- The opportunity for professional student counseling.**

Past studies have indicated a need for knowledgeable counselors for international students to address their physical and mental health problems due to cultural difficulties with the host culture. **(Aubrey, 1991).** As mentioned before, exchange and international students experience a drastic change in environment, from one day to another. This may be an even greater change for Asian exchange students since the native culture and familiar environment is very different from the Dutch culture and The Netherlands. Mental health problems and emotional constraint among this group of students may manifest itself in physical concerns **(Wang, 2011).** Therefore it is best to hire professional counselors on campus, so problems may be well addressed in order for the physical, as well as emotional, stability to be improved.

**- Setting up study support groups.**

Studying in a foreign country successfully, while adapting to the cultural and environmental changes, can be a challenge. However, for some students this puts them in a position where they experience a lot of stress adjusting to their new situation. Not only affects this stress the mental (and sometimes even physical) health, but it can also cause the students' grades in a negative way, causing them to decrease. **(Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013)**. However, there can be a more 'social' solution for students experiencing problems in the situation of combining studying whilst at the same time adjusting to a new (cultural) environment: weekly study groups. The Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in The Netherlands has a support programme set up for exchange and international students, aiming at helping these students academically. This weekly group will help you being or becoming a successful student. The group is intended for students who would like to reflect on their study habits and share experiences with other international students. Every week a study plan is made and discussed with fellow students. **(Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2013)**.

**- Organizing an informal event for the students of the ESCM academy.**

Erasmus University has a "Food Evening" event organized for its exchange students. In this "Food Evening" event, every exchange students makes food from their own culture/country. This is a good initiative on the part of Erasmus to let the exchange students socialize together. However, at THU we can also do a similar event like the "Food Evening" Erasmus organizes. But instead of only doing it for the exchange students of the ESCM academy, it can be done for all of the students of the ESCM academy. This is a great opportunity for the students to socialize in an informal setting. The exchange students can meet Dutch students and interact with them, and Dutch students can interact with the exchange students. This makes for a good opportunity to learn from each other's countries and cultures as well.

**- Adding videos, especially designed for exchange students, to the THU website.**

THU does not have many video's on their website. It could be an idea to make videos in which exchange students are interviewed about THU, the educational system of THU, life in The Hague and in The Netherlands, about the interaction with teachers and social interaction with other exchange students or Dutch students. It will be interesting for a "potential exchange student" to watch a video like this, since it will give the views of another exchange student.

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## Appendix 1

### Interview Ms./Mrs. Marjo Bijman – International Office

**B= Ms./Mrs. Bijman**

**S= Soraya**

#### **Abbreviations: IO= International office**

**B:** First, I have to explain a little bit about the exchange program: You can only become an exchange student when The Hague University of Applied Sciences has a contract, a bilateral agreement, with another. Most of all the Asian exchange students are from partner institutions, so they know a little bit about the procedure. If a partner institution tells me there is coming a student for the next semester, I send him, the partner and the student, information. What they have to do to fill out a form, go to our website. And when I receive all information: the documents (application documents, passport etc.). Then I have to apply for their entry visa.

**S:** Does the IO also give some cultural information, where they can find information about the Dutch culture. Or anything cultural?

**B:** No nothing at all, I think they receive that information during their introduction period. Because they are getting a bag, and there is information from the ACKU office, that's the only thing. And if they are picked up by their pick-up service; they are going to tell them about the student unions. But we don't give any information about the Dutch culture.

**S:** Are there any students, that when they arrive to The Netherlands, that they need support from the IO? And what kind of support do they get from the IO, is it really technical (administrational) or also matters about housing?

**B:** Academic matters are always dealt with the student program, but information about housing, insurances, doctors etc. they can get it here.

**S:** Before they come to the Netherlands, do you have any regular contacts with the students? Or is it only for the administrative matters, the forms etc.

**B:** Yes, well there are also students who want to know everything beforehand. And it's always e-mail contact, so I do that through e-mail. And also, how far the students live, the more information they want beforehand.

A lot of information can be found on our website: [www.thehagueuniversity.com](http://www.thehagueuniversity.com). And they can find information about the application, their entry visa, residence permit and housing. A lot of information is available on the website of THU.

**S:** Can the exchange students also come to the IO to arrange something for housing, if they do not have any accommodation yet?

**B:** The only thing we can do is give them a list of private housing agencies, because they tried DUWO for example. DUWO is always the first contact they can make, because we have a contract with DUWO, so we have a lot of houses available for them. But if they think it is too expensive for them, they are going to find a place on their own and then we have a list of private housing agencies.

And we have a contract with DUWO to, each semester, take 200 rooms. But if they are full, because it's on demand (first come first serve), then they have to find some other things.

**S:** If you have students with a lot of questions, like you said before, then you probably give them the e-mail of someone from the academy?

**B:** Yes, that is correct, but if they go to the website there is a facebook page, and they can put their questions there. And that will be answered by Communication and Marketing. But that is not concerned with the application of their entry visa etc. etc., I think it concerns more with personal things.

**S:** So in conclusion, the IO only deals with the administrative matters like the application, residence permit, enrollment etc.

**B:** The exchange is completely done by me, the IO. We also have some information about housing, so we work as an intermediary between the students and DUWO. So, if they



have any problem with the application for housing, we can help them with that, but there it stops.

**S:** Ok, so it's just the administrative matters, and partly the housing. However, it's just the administrative matters. Well, that's actually all I needed to know about the information exchange from and to the exchange students, before and after they arrive in The Netherlands. Thank you for your time.

**B:** You're welcome.

## Appendix 2

### Interview Mr. Le Coq – Country tutor Asia

**C= Mr. Le Coq**

**S= Soraya**

**S:** My name is Soraya Sheombar and I am doing my bachelor thesis about the cultural obstacles of Asian guest students at THU/ESCM academy. My first question is: what are your tasks of the country tutor for Asia?

**C:** For incoming students is my task to welcome them when they come in, but most of that is done by Mrs. De Louw. And to give them information in the first session, general information: how they should move around town, how they can proceed in getting a bank account, what they should be aware of while they're here. So, I give them general information.

**S:** I know that there are many exchange students coming to THU from all parts of the world, is it that you give the specific Asian students that information?

**C:** Yes, the Asian students and the Australian students.

**S:** Do you have any contact with the exchange students before the exchange? And if so, what kind of information would you give them? Is it information about the culture or anything else?

**C:** No, not before the exchange with incoming students. I do have contact with their universities, but I actually only see their names, because these students are nominated: I get their names and then the whole process is on them, and it's actually dealt with by the incoming student coordinator, and that's Mrs. De Louw.

**S:** Every year, many students from Asian countries come to The Netherlands to study. Research shows that many students from Asian countries have problems related to the culture in the Netherlands. Hofstede (2005) argues that the power distance in Asian countries at the school level is very large, which means that the relationship between student and teacher is one of dependence: the student depends on the teacher, is obedient and respectful towards him/her.

- Do you feel that difference in how Asian students engage with you is different from Dutch students? And in what way are they different compared to the Dutch students?

**C:** Yes, there is a difference. You were talking about the power distance in the Asian (Korean, Chinese, Japanese) teaching system, which is much bigger than in our case. Dutch students, our students, tend to be more free in their contact with the teacher, we tend to say that Asian students are more shy. It is not really that they are shy, but they don't contact the teacher as easy as our own students do. That is because the distance between the professor and the student in Asian countries is much bigger, and you don't approach a teacher just like that. And in class you don't ask questions, and you don't have discussions; and we have discussions, whenever you want to ask a question you ask a question. And Asian students are not used to doing that, so that reflects in how they deal with/approach their teachers

**S:** So the Asian students are much more reserved in dealing with the teachers?

**C:** Yes, they are.

**S:** The Netherlands is a very individualist country, which means there is a pronounced focus on the self and their individual needs. On the other hand, many Asian countries are very collectivist, which means they tend to have an "in-group" they belong to, which protects them in exchange for loyalty. Many Asian students tend to have difficulties dealing with the very individual mindset and culture from Dutch people. Also, research has shown that many Asian exchange/international students and Dutch students are capable of working together for projects, but they generally don't socialize with each other apart from school-related work. (Smet, 2012).

- Why do you think there is such a separation between Asian students and Dutch students?

**C:** The difference in culture, so high-context/low-context is such that, Asian students operate more in groups and are less individual and less inclined to take the initiative. So that is one thing, and we see that a lot in the Chinese students that we have, for instance in our prep-school where most are Chinese students, and they usually tend to stay in their own group, it's very hard to get them to socialize with other groups of students. The other way around, it works the same way, because apparently our Dutch students do not socialize much with Asian students. Maybe because of the same reason, they think that Asian students are less approachable, more difficult to approach. That may be true: Asian

students tend to be very polite and smiling; on the other hand it is somehow difficult to approach them. The reason may be that their culture is as such. They are, as you said, protected by the group; if they belong to a group, they are protected by it. And our culture tends to be much more individual and straightforward, so that might be a reason. We try to, of course, integrate these groups of students. But what I see in classes as well, is that when they have to form groups (and in some cases they do because there is group work to do): If they are full-time students (so they do the 3 or 4-year course) then you see that changes over time. So they are quicker to socialize and easier to work in groups with Dutch and other international students as well. Whereas exchange students, due to the fact that they are only here for one semester (some are here for two semesters), do not have the time to develop that. And as I said, it works both ways: because our students, in some cases, do not make a real effort to socialize. It's a difficult aspect of the internalization process here.

**S:** I do recognize what you say from a minor I had last year, with fellow ES students, ICM students and also a couple of Asian students. I was quicker to socialize with the ICM students, which I did not know before, than with the Asian students. In some way, it doesn't seem as if they are very willing to socialize with you. It is true that they seem quite hard to approach.

**C:** Well, they are not hard to approach, as you say, they seem to be quite hard to approach. But when you talk to them, because they seem to be quite working by themselves and sticking to their own friends: that our students do not make an effort to really start talking and socializing with them. Because they are on their own in class in some cases, so "why, bother?" that's what our students think I guess. And I know, from experience, that when you talk to these students, when I meet them in the corridors (and ask them if they are exchange students) and ask "how are you getting along" or "how are things going?", they are actually quite willing to talk and answer. They are quite happy as well if you approach them.

**S:** I have had that experience as well on my exchange in the UK. Personally, I haven't socialized much with British people.

**C:** And what was the reason? Did the British students try to socialize with you?

**S:** We actually didn't have many classes with British people, so there was not much opportunity to socialize with British people. However, I have to say that British people did

not make an effort to really socialize with us either, and we also did not approach British students. There was much more contact between the international and exchange students, because you are in the exact same situation. And I think that is also what creates a bond, the sharing of similar things.

- Are there any students that come to you when they need help in terms of difficulties in dealing with the Dutch culture? And what support do you give these students?

**C:** Well, most of the support for the incoming exchange students is done by the exchange office, which is run by Mrs. De Louw and Ms. Faber. So they have most of the contact. If there is any problem for an exchange student, whether it's about the schedule or exams, or about life in The Hague; the first point of contact is Mrs. De Louw and Ms. Faber. And what we experienced in the Europe@Home project, one of the things that seem to be difficult is keeping in touch with the students, from both sides. So the Dutch students who were doing the project have difficulty in contacting the exchange students. Why? I'm not quite sure, or they couldn't do it. So, when there's a complaint there, they usually come to me and we can give them support and connect them to the group. But they are fairly capable of taking care of themselves. But if there are any real problems, their first point of contact is the coordinating office where Mrs. De Louw will talk to them.

**S:** Thank you for your time Mr. Le Coq, it seems I have all the answers I was looking for.

**C:** No Problem, if there is anything you need more, you can contact me.

**S:** Thank you.

## Appendix 3

### Interview Gengo Kikuchi – Exchange student

**GK = Gengo Kikuchi**

**S= Soraya**

**S:** Hi, my name is Soraya Sheombar and I am doing a research for my bachelor thesis about the cultural obstacles of Asian guest students at THU.

The culture in the Netherlands is very different from an Asian culture in many aspects and there are various things Asian students need to adapt to when coming to The Netherlands to study, for example the weather and the food. Were there any things you needed to get used to and any cultural difficulties you experienced? If so, can you name any situations?

**GK:** Yes, that is true. The culture in The Netherlands is very different from our culture, and I think it is especially difficult for Eastern Asian students to adapt to the culture. For me, sharing my apartment with another student was somewhat getting used to. He is not Dutch, he is also an exchange student, but from an Eastern European country. But his culture is more similar to the Dutch culture I think; it is not so much different. His culture is different from mine, so it is a bit difficult to live together. However, it is not a big problem. He is someone who wants to talk and communicate more with me, while I want to be alone sometimes. I don't really like much noise, I prefer quiet and silence.

Also, the Dutch food is very different from the food I am used to; I don't really enjoy eating Dutch food very much. I had a difficult time in finding Japanese restaurants here, and the Japanese restaurants here are also very expensive, the prices here are almost three/four times higher than the prices in Japan.

**S:** Before you came to THU to study, there was probably someone from the university you had contact with, to arrange the university documents and others administrative matters. How was that communication and information transfer with THU? And did you have any other questions related to THU or Dutch culture which you could ask them?

**GK:** Yes, the International Office contacted my school and me, but it was mostly administrative matters that had to be dealt with. I did not really have any questions relating to the university or culture. Arranging the documents for THU did go well, the information was clear in terms of the documents I had to prepare.

**S:** Before students go abroad to study, they usually gather as much information as possible about the country and the culture. What kind of information did you gather and how was the access to information about The Netherlands and the Dutch culture?

**GK:** For me, I did not have a lot of expectations from The Netherlands in terms of culture; I did not know much about The Netherlands and the Dutch culture before I came here, so it was all new to me. In Japan it is very difficult to find much information about The Netherlands and the Dutch culture.

**S:** For exchange students there is an introduction week in the beginning of the semester. In that week students get various kinds of information; a welcome, sessions about subjects, practical information and some fun time to meet and get to know other exchange students at THU. Do you think your introduction week was very informative, or do you think there was information missing, that you wish you have had when you started living in The Netherlands?

**GK:** Yes, the introduction week was very helpful to me. I met other international/exchange students, I think it is important to get to know other students as well and make some friends. I don't think there was information missing, I think we had been provided with a lot of information. The information was helpful to me. And also, I think you learn things and experience things by the time you are here. So the longer you are here for, the more you learn about the people and the Dutch culture.

**S:** Of course, living in The Netherlands can be very challenging at first, since it is a whole new environment. Was it hard finding your way in The Hague and at The Hague University (in terms of schedules, finding rooms etc.; the practical matters)?

**GK:** It is not so much of a difficulty in the university, like finding rooms or about the schedules. You can always ask someone for help, if there are any problems with the schedule or if you can't find rooms. But it is more about the daily stuff, like for example how the public transport works, where to get trams, busses and trains; also where to buy groceries. It would be nice if we had gotten more information about the public transport and daily stuff like where to buy groceries.

**S:** Did you have any major problems in The Netherlands, in terms of the food, the weather or any other things? And was there someone from the university you could go to for advice, and what kind of advice/support did he/she give you?

**GK:** I did not really have any major problems that I could not deal with. If there were some minor problems, I usually try to get to solutions myself instead of asking someone for help. For example, when I had to post a letter to an organization in Amsterdam, I did not know how to post a letter or where to go. But I asked someone where to post the letter, and the person gave me the direction of where to go. Dutch people are very clear in that, they will help you if they can help you, but if they don't know the answer they will say it too and say that it will be better to ask someone else. However, I can't really get used to the Dutch food. Some types of Dutch food are nice, but overall I don't really like eating the Dutch food; I miss the food from home (Japan). Japanese food is very expensive in The Netherlands, back home (in Japan) the food costs three to four times less than here.

**S:** In the timetable of exchange students there is a module called "Dutch Culture & Society", to learn about Dutch culture. Did the classes help you in gaining an understanding of Dutch culture and people, if so can you give some examples?

**GK:** Yes, I liked the classes "Dutch Culture & Society", they gave a more broad and general overview of the Dutch culture. However, I wanted to know more about the minor things, for example about what the typical Dutch foods are, how Dutch families are; the more traditional things. I researched about Dutch art; it was very interesting, Dutch art. But in the module, it would be nice to learn about how Dutch students are and how their life here in The Netherlands is. In the classes they gave more "major" and general information, whereas I wanted to know more about "minor" things.

**S:** Every year, many students from Asian countries come to The Netherlands to study. Research shows that many students from Asian countries have problems related to the culture in the Netherlands. Hofstede (2005) argues that the power distance in Asian countries at the school level is very large, which means that the relationship between student and teacher is one of dependence: the student depends on the teacher, is obedient and respectful towards him/her.

- Do you feel that difference in classes at THU compared to classes at your home institution? And how was the adaptation process for this difference between student-teacher when you started here?



**GK:** There is a difference in this aspect, but I think it is more about getting used to it, because it is not “shocking” or a very big issue personally for me. Of course, the situation and relationship between teachers is different than here, but it is not a very big issue for me. I think here in class, Asians have to be more social and active. For me, it’s kind of like to become a different person almost. For example, when I speak Japanese I am Japanese, but when I am at THU and speaking English, I have to be more social and different.

Whenever there are discussions in class, the Asian students are much more hesitant to speak up, unless they are specifically asked to answer a question by the teacher; Asians are much more reluctant to speak up in class or participate to a class discussion. It is different from the Dutch students here, they are much more active and participating in class. I think the teachers should also “care” a bit more about the students, knowing that they are different in this aspect compared to Dutch students. Asian students also have the same capabilities and intelligence as Dutch students, but they are just much more hesitant to speak up and share their information, because it’s in their culture. For me, I just think about things much more slow and thorough, before I want to share it with anyone. Maybe, teachers can ask Asian students questions specifically or “direct” Asian students a bit more, so they can join in with discussions and be more active. Because if teachers just leave discussions up to the class, then it is likely that Asian students will not participate from their own initiative.

Also, the ability of Asian students to speak English at a certain level is also important. For example, some Asian students are not comfortable with speaking English, even though they can understand it. And sometimes, students cannot verbalize their thoughts and opinions very good in English, and they are afraid of others not understanding them or misunderstanding them.

**S:** The Netherlands is a very individualist country, which means there is a pronounced focus on the self and their individual needs. On the other hand, many Asian countries are very collectivist, which means they tend to have an “in-group” they belong to, which protects them in exchange for loyalty. Many Asian students tend to have difficulties dealing with the very individual mindset and culture from Dutch people. Also, research has shown that many Asian exchange/international students and Dutch students are capable of working together for projects, but they generally don’t socialize with each other apart from school-related work. (Smet, 2012).

- What difficulties did you have in dealing with the individual mindset of the Dutch, and do you have any Dutch friends? How is the contact with them?

**GK:** I did not really have a problem in dealing with Dutch people, they are generally very friendly and help you if you have questions. I do have Dutch friends, but not very much. I have more contact with other international students. Maybe, it is the difference in lifestyle and personal interests, that's why I do not have much contact with Dutch students.

**S:** I have a last question about the contact with your home institution, during your exchange. How was the contact with your home institution during your exchange at THU in The Netherlands? Was there support you needed from your home institution?

**GK:** I did not have very much contact with my home institution, maybe with my supervisor for administrative matters, documents for example. However, I did not have regular contact. Personally, I don't think I needed very much support in terms of the fact that I could not cope with the culture here. For me, it is more that I had to get used to the environment, but with time it gets easier to find your way around here.

**S:** Thank you so much for your time, I believe I have all the information I needed.

**GK:** No problem, it was my pleasure. Good luck with your thesis.

**S:** Thank you.

## Appendix 4

### Interview Eunjin Yu – Exchange student

**EY= Eunjin Yu**

**S= Soraya**

**S:** Hi, my name is Soraya Sheombar and I am doing a research for my bachelor thesis about the cultural obstacles of Asian guest students at THU.

The Dutch culture is very different from an Asian culture. Research shows that many students who come from Asian countries to study, experience stress in adapting to their new environment. Did you personally have any negative/positive cultural experiences in The Netherlands? If so, can you name any situations? You can think of things like the weather or the food etc.

**EY:** Personally, I did not have any major problems in adapting to the new environment. I am quite comfortable and easygoing when it comes to cultural differences in general, I guess I am just more open towards it. It could also partly be because I have lived abroad for some years when I was younger; I lived in a country where the national language was English. What was a bit getting used to, was the weather. In the beginning, when I came in past August, the weather was very nice. But after a while it got cold and started raining a lot. In terms of food, I live in a student dorm, so I can make my own food. I did not really try Dutch food that much, however I do like herring and stroopwafels.

The Dutch language was also a bit hard at first, I was in the Dutch language class in the beginning of the exchange, but the pronunciation was a bit difficult for me. And also, in the supermarkets the labels are all in Dutch and the ingredients on the back are also mostly in Dutch, which was a bit frustrating at first. But I got used to it with time.

**S:** When you arrived to The Netherlands, there was an introduction week organized for the exchange students. How did you find the introduction week, what kind of information did you get and was it helpful? Or was there anything missing according to you?

**EY:** Yes, we had an introduction week, but in my opinion it was a bit too long for an introduction. We got a lot of helpful information about the university and how to get around here, and find our way. I remember there was also a representative from the Dutch police here, he gave us general information about the safety in The Hague and advised us on

what to do and not to do here. But most of the information we got in the introduction week was practical information about the school and some cultural information about The Netherlands and Dutch people as well.

**S:** So did you get any information about the daily things, like for example about how the public transport works or about where to find groceries? And what kind of information did you think would be helpful if the university had given during the introduction week?

**EY:** No we did not get information like that during the introduction, about where to find groceries or anything. It was more like we had to find that out ourselves. But it would be helpful if the university gave us information like that, about the daily stuff, like where to find supermarkets. However, I did know some supermarkets and shops, since I came with Interaccess, and the people from Interaccess who brought us to our building did mention some places to get groceries. So I knew that already, but for some other students who did not know that, it would be helpful if the school had gotten them more information about those daily things like transport and supermarkets etc.

**S:** Of course an Asian culture is very different from a Western culture, like the Dutch culture. Did you have an expectation of what to expect from The Netherlands and Dutch culture and people in general? In what way did you prepare yourself before coming here, for example like going to the THU website, looking up information on the internet and/or reading books?

**EY:** Yes I did prepare myself before coming to The Netherlands, I looked at the website of the university, and the information was quite helpful for knowing beforehand. In our university there were also students who went here before, and they made reports, so I read the reports as well.

**S:** So you had quite a good idea of what to expect from the university and The Netherlands in general? Was the picture you had from the Netherlands beforehand, somewhat similar to reality; and in what way?

**EY:** Yes, it was quite similar to the reality. The reports were quite helpful in gaining information about other things others than the sometimes “practical” information about the university, which I could also look up from the THU website. Because, the reports were also about the daily lives about the students, their social group and stuff like that.

However, I have been overseas before when I was younger. So for me it was a bit more aware of cultural differences so to say, I am bit more easygoing when it comes to cultural differences. Also, from the reports of the students at my home university who had been here earlier, I read about Dutch people as well. Unfortunately I haven't quite socialized with Dutch students so far; my social circle has so far only been with others exchange and international students.

**S:** So did you wish you had more opportunities to socialize with Dutch students? And did you have any social contact with Dutch students, for example in working in group projects, and how did that interaction with Dutch students go?

**EY:** Yes we did have a project where I had to work with Dutch students as well. So it was like one exchange students per group. It was nice working with Dutch students, but it was only for the group project, other than that we didn't socialize much. However, there was a student who was interested in Korean culture, so we became friends and that was nice.

**S:** For exchange students, they can always go to the guest student office if they need help or support with anything school-related or non school-related. Can you tell a bit more about the guidance/support that office gave you over the course of the past months?

**EY:** I haven't really been much to the guest students office, if I have a problem I usually try to solve it myself first. Also, when I have some sort of problem I ask my Dutch friend about it or my other Korean friends. We have pretty strong network. For example, when I first came here, another Korean student who had already been here for the semester before, she told us about how to use the public transport.

**S:** In the timetable for exchange students there is a module "Dutch Culture & Society". Are the classes Dutch Culture & Society helpful? Did they help in gaining an understanding of Dutch culture? Did they help you to adapt better to Dutch culture?

**EY:** Yeah, it was nice to have some classes about the Dutch culture, it was quite interesting. But it wasn't necessarily needed, for me at least, in order to adapt to Dutch culture. The adaptation process wasn't really hard for me. It's basically just about getting used to the new environment.

**S:** Every year, many students from Asian countries come to The Netherlands to study. Research shows that many students from Asian countries have problems related to the culture in the Netherlands. Hofstede (2005) argues that the power distance in Asian countries at the school level is very large, which means that the relationship between student and teacher is one of dependence: the student depends on the teacher, is obedient and respectful towards him/her.

- How is that difference in power distance for you? Do you have any negative or positive experience(s) with that difference in power distance?

**EY:** That was something that was different, but it was quite positive as well. It was a bit strange because it's not what I am used to. I remember one time that a teacher was introducing himself and he wrote his first name on the board, and he said we could call him by his first name. In Korea we can't do that, we call our teacher 'professor' or by his/her last name. And also, here we are allowed to use our mobile phones in class as long as we don't disturb others with it. However, in our country we are absolutely not allowed to use our mobile phones during class. Here in The Netherlands teachers and students seem to have more close personal relationships, whereas in Korea it's usually not the case. There are a few students who do have more close relationships with teachers, but it's not very likely in our country. It seems that here in The Netherlands students are more free in contacting teachers.

**S:** Thank you for your cooperation for the interview, that's all I needed to know.

**EY:** It was no problem, my pleasure. Good luck with your thesis.

**S:** Thank you very much

## Appendix 5

### Interview Keunyoung Moon – Exchange student

**KM= Keunyoung Moon**

**S= Soraya**

**S:** Hi, my name is Soraya Sheombar and I am doing a research for my bachelor thesis about the cultural obstacles of Asian guest students at THU.

The Dutch culture is very different from an Asian culture. Research shows that many students who come from Asian countries to study, experience stress in adapting to their new environment. Did you personally have any negative/positive cultural experiences in The Netherlands? If so, can you name any situations? You can think of things like the weather or the food etc.

**KM:** The weather is quite rainy here, especially when I came. The weather is a bit difficult to deal with, because I wanted to go to the city and do all kinds of things, but then when it starts to rain, I stop everything and go home. So the weather was a bit of a negative point. And also the public transportation was a bit difficult and the school did not give us any information about this, so we had to find out by ourselves. I still don't really know how the tram works.

However, there are of course positive things as well, for example, I like the market of The Hague and the Dutch food. I like the Dutch cheese and all the dairy products, and also the fresh bread. However, it is kind of difficult here to find rice, the sticky rice that we eat.

**S:** You probably have had information about THU from your home institution before coming here to study.

- How did your home institution prepare you for your exchange? For example, did you get information about the culture in The Netherlands and its people, or just information about the university?

**KM:** I did not really get much information about the cultural differences from my university. They did not give us much information about The Netherlands; I had to basically look information about the Netherlands and The Hague University up for myself. My university mostly dealt with the administrative matters and the documents that had to be sent to The Netherlands.

**S:** And how did your home institution prepare you for the cultural differences between The Netherlands and your country of origin?

**KM:** They did not really prepare us for the cultural differences, they only told us to be careful and look after ourselves really well. They did have a small briefing in the beginning, where they did tell us that the culture is different and that we might get a culture shock, but that we had to be open-minded and accept the differences in a harmonious way.

**S:** Usually when one goes for an exchange to another country, there is a contact person, or supervisor, to contact during the exchange. How was the contact with your home institution and did you get support from your home institution, and if so how?

**KM:** I did not contact my home institution after I came here personally. I did let them know I arrived and that everything was good. But I did not have very regular contact with them. Usually, I just contact my parents and close friends.

**S:** When you arrived to The Netherlands, there was an introduction week organized for incoming exchange students.

- Was the information in the introduction week helpful, or was there something missing according to you?

**KM:** Well I have to say, overall, the introduction week was good and organized very well, but it was a bit too long. It was also a bit tiring as well since it lasted for a whole week. I had hoped we got more information about the school building, since I don't know all the buildings. And also, I'd like to know places where you can buy books for school. But overall, the information we received from the university was very good, and we got to meet with some teachers from the academy as well.

**S:** In the timetable for exchange students, there is a module "Dutch culture and Society".

- Are the classes Dutch Culture and Society helpful? Do they help in gaining an understanding in Dutch Culture? Did they help you in order to adapt better to the Dutch culture?

**KM:** Well so far I've only had a few classes of that module, so I can't really tell yet whether they have helped me much in adapting to the culture. But I do enjoy the module,



and learning about Dutch people and the culture. On the other hand, I don't really think that the cultural values are so strongly different from each other that there is an inherent need to adapt to it. Personally, I was aware of these cultural differences and from research, I knew what I could expect once I would come here, but I don't really feel that I had a "huge" culture shock. Maybe it is because I had done research before I came here, and also because I am open minded to new people and cultures.

**S:** So what kind of research did you do before you came here? Was there a particular field/area you did research to?

**KM:** I mostly researched about the culture, and the differences with the Korean culture, and also about the food and the people, the places to visit etc. However, the looking up for information about the Netherlands and Dutch culture, through the internet, was mostly by my own initiative. The school did not give any particular information about a country or culture.

**S:** Every year, many students from Asian countries come to The Netherlands to study. Research shows that many students from Asian countries have problems related to the culture in the Netherlands. Hofstede (2005) argues that the power distance in Asian countries at the school level is very large, which means that the relationship between student and teacher is one of dependence: the student depends on the teacher, is obedient and respectful towards him/her.

- Do you feel that difference in power distance here in comparison with your home institution?

And how is dealing with that for you?

**KM:** Personally I feel that the students and teachers here, in The Netherlands, are very informal in their interaction with each other. I had a lecture, it was the first class/lecture for that subject, and the teacher introduced himself with his first name and he said we could call him by his first name. That was very strange to me, because we cannot do that in our university. It is quite awkward for me to call a professor by his or her first name. But I think it is quite good as well to have more informality between students and teachers, I think it makes engagement easier.

There was also another incident where the teacher was giving a lecture and suddenly a discussion came up in class. Apparently, a student here can "talk back" to a teacher, that

was very unusual to me and I did not know what to do in that situation. In our country one never questions a teacher's knowledge, and there are almost never discussions in class. Here, it seemed as if the teacher was even enjoying and encouraging the discussion.

**S:** The Netherlands is a very individualist country, which means there is a pronounced focus on the self and their individual needs. On the other hand, many Asian countries are very collectivist, which means they tend to have an "in-group" they belong to, which protects them in exchange for loyalty. Many Asian students tend to have difficulties dealing with the very individual mindset and culture from Dutch people. Also, research has shown that many Asian exchange/international students and Dutch students are capable of working together for projects, but they generally don't socialize with each other apart from school-related work. (Smet, 2012).

- Were there situations where you could feel that individualist aspect at school and how did you deal with that?

**KM:** Yes I could feel in the "atmosphere" that in The Netherlands people are very focused on themselves and are really independent. Here in the school you can also sense that difference, the "feel" that I have at my university is just different. However, I don't have any problem with the individualist aspect at school, because it is in some ways the same as in our school. The students at our school are also somewhat individualistic when it comes to school work and project. In our projects, it's kind of the same as here in The Netherlands: the work gets evenly divided and the student works on it on his/her own.

However, what I also noticed in The Netherlands is that students are not competitive at all. In our society competition plays a role, and you have to get good/high grades to make your family proud and feel good about yourself. But here, it seems as if the students are just concerned of passing the module. There is no feel of competition at all in classrooms.

**S:** Thank you for your time, I think I have all of the information I needed to know.

**KM:** My pleasure, any time. Good luck with your thesis.

**S:** Thank you.

## Appendix 6

### Interview Ji Eun Lee – Exchange student

**KM= JEL**

**S=Soraya**

**S:** Hi, my name is Soraya Sheombar and I am doing a research for my bachelor thesis about the cultural obstacles of Asian guest students at THU.

The Dutch culture is very different from an Asian culture. Research shows that many students who come from Asian countries to study, experience stress in adapting to their new environment. Did you personally have any negative/positive cultural experiences in The Netherlands? If so, can you name any situations? You can think of things like the weather or the food etc.

**JEL:** The weather was a bit gloomy, and lately there have also been a lot of rainy, windy and cold days; but the weather is not something that can be controlled. Apart from the weather, I had problems with the transport, more precisely with getting an ov-chipkaart, but with the help of Mrs. De Louw it turned out alright. What happened was that the company had a bit of problems with my address and it couldn't be sent. However, it was a bit difficult in terms of contact and communication with the company (client service), because on the phone there are several steps to follow and it was all in Dutch, so it was hard for me to understand.

**S:** You probably have had information about THU from your home institution before coming here to study.

- How did your home institution prepare you for your exchange? For example, did you get information about the culture in The Netherlands and its people, or just information about the university?

**JEL:** My university did not prepare me for the exchange in The Netherlands in particular, there was a general lecture that I had before I came here. The information I received was more about being careful and looking after yourself which is more general information, instead of specific country and culture-based information. Our International Office is also very busy with a lot of exchange of incoming and outgoing students, so they could not really provide us with much information. But I did do a bit of research about the Netherlands and the Dutch culture on the internet. I did get information about the

university and I went to the website of the university as well, since there was a lot of information available there.

**S:** And how did your home institution prepare you for the cultural differences between The Netherlands and your country of origin?

**JEL:** I wasn't prepared by my university in terms of culture and cultural differences. So I had to look up information about the Dutch culture by myself. The most part of the information I received, was related to the documents I had to send to the International Office of The Hague University, and the application procedure.

**S:** Usually when one goes for an exchange to another country, there is a contact person, or supervisor, to contact during the exchange. How was the contact with your home institution and did you get support from your home institution, and if so how?

**JEL:** I did not really have much contact with my home institution, I do send them an update every once in while, but I don't have regular contact with someone from my home institution. It's mostly my parents and friends that I regularly contact, to let them know how I am doing and to know how they are.

**S:** When you arrived to The Netherlands, there was an introduction week organized for incoming exchange students.

- Was the information in the introduction week helpful, or was there something missing according to you?

**JEL:** The introduction week was very helpful and fun as well. We got a lot of information about the school, we got to meet some of our supervisors and got our timetables. But I do think the introduction week was a bit too long, it lasted for a week, so in my opinion I found it a bit long. However, the activities during the introduction were fun: the cultural game and the market in the canteen where we could try some Dutch foods; the tour in on the boat was fun as well.

**S:** In the timetable for exchange students, there is a module "Dutch culture and Society".

- Are the classes Dutch Culture and Society helpful? Do they help in gaining an understanding in Dutch Culture? Did they help you in order to adapt better to the Dutch culture?

**JEL:** The classes are fun, and it is interesting for me to learn about new cultures and people, in this case The Dutch culture and The Netherlands. But I don't really think that the classes really helped me much in adapting to the culture here. For me it was more getting used to the differences in environment, atmosphere, people and cultural differences with time. I think it is the same for every person going abroad for an extended period of more than a couple of weeks or a vacation, you'll notice certain differences and some you can identify with and some not at all. But I think it is just about accepting that things are different than you might be used to compared to back home, and dealing with those differences in the best possible way. A good preparation in advance is always good.

**S:** And how did you prepare yourself? Did you think the preparation was sufficient enough in order to decrease the amount of culture shock experienced?

**JEL:** I think I did not really experience a culture shock because of a good preparation. I researched on the internet about the Dutch people and culture. I also looked at images of The Hague and Amsterdam.

**S:** Every year, many students from Asian countries come to The Netherlands to study. Research shows that many students from Asian countries have problems related to the culture in the Netherlands. Hofstede (2005) argues that the power distance in Asian countries at the school level is very large, which means that the relationship between student and teacher is one of dependence: the student depends on the teacher, is obedient and respectful towards him/her.

- Do you feel that difference in power distance here in comparison with your home institution?

And how is dealing with that for you?

**JEL:** Yes there is definitely a difference in the way of teaching here in The Netherlands and the way they teach in my country, Korea. In Korea, you can't talk freely with the professor or "question his knowledge" and creating a discussion. Here I've experienced that students are not very reserved in the classrooms, and they daringly ask a teacher everything they want, sometimes it seems as if the students want a discussion.

**S:** The Netherlands is a very individualist country, which means there is a pronounced focus on the self and their individual needs. On the other hand, many Asian countries are very collectivist, which means they tend to have an "in-group" they belong to, which protects them in exchange for loyalty. Many Asian students tend to have difficulties

dealing with the very individual mindset and culture from Dutch people. Also, research has shown that many Asian exchange/international students and Dutch students are capable of working together for projects, but they generally don't socialize with each other apart from school-related work. (Smet, 2012).

- Were there situations where you could feel that individualist aspect at school and how did you deal with that?

**JEL:** The Dutch are indeed very individualist it seems, but in my opinion it is more the self-reliant and independent attitude they have. In my opinion, I think that is a good attribute to have, but that is a difference from the way the people in Asia generally are. Asian people are more inclined to have very good contacts with family and very close ties to uncles and aunts. Whereas here in The Netherlands it does not seem as if the people have very close ties with their families, apart from their parents and siblings.

**S:** Thank you, I think I have all the answers needed.

**JEL:** No problem, if you need any more information you can always contact me.

**S:** Thank you.

## Appendix 7

### Interview Inae Park – Exchange student

**KM= Inae Park**

**S= Soraya**

**S:** Hi, my name is Soraya Sheombar and I am doing a research for my bachelor thesis about the cultural obstacles of Asian guest students at THU.

The Dutch culture is very different from an Asian culture. Research shows that many students who come from Asian countries to study, experience stress in adapting to their new environment. Did you personally have any negative/positive cultural experiences in The Netherlands? If so, can you name any situations? You can think of things like the weather or the food etc.

**IP:** My health condition seemed to have decreased since coming to The Netherlands. I think it's because of the difference in atmosphere...the environment and atmosphere is very different from Asia, as well as the food, drinking water and weather. I think I will need to go to the doctor for a check-up, maybe to get prescriptions.

I do like the food in The Netherlands, but actually I prefer food from my own country and culture, since I am more used to it. However, it is very hard to find the right ingredients for the food, even in the Oriental store.

**S:** You probably have had information about THU from your home institution before coming here to study.

- How did your home institution prepare you for your exchange? For example, did you get information about the culture in The Netherlands and its people, or just information about the university?

**IP:** My home institution did not really give me much information about the Dutch culture. The International Office at the university gave me mostly information about what documents needed to be filled in, and sent to the International Office of THU. There was a formal session at my university to inform the students about the exchange and what to prepare before leaving to The Netherlands. They did tell us to be aware of cultural differences and to research in advance about the culture of the country where you're

going to. However, that was general for every student, regardless of which country they were going to study.

**S:** Usually when one goes for an exchange to another country, there is a contact person, or supervisor, to contact during the exchange. How was the contact with your home institution and did you get support from your home institution, and if so how?

**IP:** I do not have much contact with my home institution, but I did contact them when I arrived and updated them about my situation here. I don't really find support by people from my home institution but more from my family and friends, since I have more contact with them.

**S:** When you arrived to The Netherlands, there was an introduction week organized for incoming exchange students.

- Was the information in the introduction week helpful, or was there something missing according to you?

**IP:** Yes, in my opinion the information from the introduction week was very helpful and I also got to meet other exchange students which was very nice. However, it would be good to get more information about the transportation in The Hague, because it was very unclear to me which tram I needed to take to go to the university.

**S:** In the timetable for exchange students, there is a module "Dutch culture and Society".

- Are the classes Dutch Culture and Society helpful? Do they help in gaining an understanding in Dutch Culture? Did they help you in order to adapt better to the Dutch culture?

**IP:** The classes are very interesting, and it is nice to learn about the Dutch culture. During the classes we have to make assignments and keep a diary or "logbook", so because of the assignments and lectures I got to know more about the Dutch culture in general.

**S:** The Netherlands is a very individualist country, which means there is a pronounced focus on the self and their individual needs. On the other hand, many Asian countries are very collectivist, which means they tend to have an "in-group" they belong to, which protects them in exchange for loyalty. Many Asian students tend to have difficulties dealing with the very individual mindset and culture from Dutch people. Also, research has shown that many Asian exchange/international students and Dutch students are



capable of working together for projects, but they generally don't socialize with each other apart from school-related work. (Smet, 2012).

- Were there situations where you could feel that individualist aspect at school and how did you deal with that?

**IP:** The Dutch are very individualist yes, but in my opinion they seem a bit distant and unapproachable. Asian people have a much more "approachable" aura around them. That's how it looks from the outside, it does not necessarily mean that the Dutch people are not sociable of course. There have been times where I had to ask about the transportation in The Hague. I did not know which tram to take to the university and the person was very helpful when I asked her which tram I needed to take.

**S:** Every year, many students from Asian countries come to The Netherlands to study. Research shows that many students from Asian countries have problems related to the culture in the Netherlands. Hofstede (2005) argues that the power distance in Asian countries at the school level is very large, which means that the relationship between student and teacher is one of dependence: the student depends on the teacher, is obedient and respectful towards him/her.

- Do you feel that difference in power distance here in comparison with your home institution?

And how is dealing with that for you?

**IP:** It is very different here in how students behave in the classroom and interact with teacher, they are very formal with one another, both the students and teachers. Also, sometimes the teacher allows the students to use their mobile phones during the class or lecture. That was very different from the way I am used to in Korea. We are not allowed to use our mobile phones during class, if we did we would immediately get dismissed from the class. But I do like the informal atmosphere in the classrooms here, I think it nice to have that. In the beginning it was something I needed to adapt to, but slowly I got used to being more informal with the teachers too, so that was nice.

**S:** Thank you, I think I have all the answers needed.

**IP:** No problem, it was my pleasure.

**S:** Thank you.

## Appendix 8

**Interview representative International Office Erasmus University Rotterdam - academy of Social Sciences (Sociale Wetenschappen).**

**The person interviewed wants to stay anonymous, therefore the abbreviation letter 'A' will be used in the interview.**

**A=Anonymous**

**S=Soraya**

**S:** Hello, my name is Soraya Sheombar and I am a student at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, European Studies. I am currently doing my final bachelor thesis for the Guest Student Office of the European Studies and Communication Management academy. My aim is to find out the obstacles of the Asian exchange students in order to accommodate them better in the educational setting of The Hague University, and to accommodate them better in the environment of The Netherlands. The recommendations are about what the Guest Student Office can change in their information exchange to the Asian exchange students, to make their stay in The Netherlands and their time here fruitful.

May I ask you a couple of questions about the introduction of the exchange students at Erasmus University and the information exchange to the incoming exchange students?

**A:** Yes, that would be fine.

**S:** Okay. At The Hague University the incoming exchange students have an introduction period organized for them in order to finalize their documents and registration at THU and to familiarize them with The Hague University and the city of The Hague. What does the Erasmus do for their incoming exchange students when they come to the university for the first time?

**A:** The Erasmus University also has an introductory period organized for their incoming exchange students, this is for the international students as well. There is a faculty introduction, because every faculty has their own introduction period for their exchange/international students. What we basically do is, we finalize all the documents of the students and then we give them general information about the university and Rotterdam. This information includes information about exams, about the library (where to

find books, how to rent them, where they can study in the school), about IT-facilities available to them and the electronical learning environment (every academy has their own learning environment) etc. So basically everything academically related and that every student needs to know when studying at Erasmus. We also organize a session about “Probleem Gestuurd Onderwijs”; there is a 7-step plan for that and we give them information about that learning system. Furthermore, we give them a tour of the campus, information about how and where to rent a bike, where the markets are and also information about general safety.

Apart from all the practical information, we also organize some fun activities for the students. There is a social programme organized with a tour in Rotterdam in order for the students to get acquainted to Rotterdam. They will also get information from several student organizations in Rotterdam.

The Erasmus University will also organize a “Food Evening”, once each semester, for the exchange and international students. What happens is the students make their own cultural/native food and they can taste each other’s food. The school rents a local café in the area of Rotterdam where the “Food Evening” takes place.

**S:** Usually, before a student comes to study as an exchange or international students, there is contact with the university before that as well. What kind of information does the Erasmus University give to students pre-departure?

**A:** There is indeed contact with the students before their departure to The Netherlands, and the Erasmus gives the students practical information: information about housing, the modules from which they can choose, information about the Erasmus Student Service Centre (part of the university that arranges all student-related affairs), information about the application and all the related documents needed for coming to The Netherlands. The Erasmus also helps the students in their visa application. The Erasmus advises the students to look at the Erasmus website for information as well, since a lot of handy information is published there as well.

**S:** Every year, many students from Asian countries come to The Netherlands to study. Research shows that many students from Asian countries have problems related to the culture in the Netherlands. Hofstede (2005) argues that the power distance in Asian countries at the school level is very large, which means that the relationship between

student and teacher is one of dependence: the student depends on the teacher, is obedient and respectful towards him/her.

- Do you feel that difference in how Asian students engage with you is different from Dutch students? And in what way are they different compared to the Dutch students?
- And what kind of problems do Asian guest students generally have in The Netherlands, related to The Dutch culture?

**A:** There are indeed some students that have minor difficulties with power distance. This can be seen in for example lectures where some students, especially Asian students, have a more formal approach towards teachers. Not only do they approach teachers in this way actually, but a more respectful, polite and formal approach towards everyone in the institution of the school. This is different from the “Dutch” way, which is very informal and direct. They are also very hesitant to speak up in class and participate in discussions, but I think that is generally part of their culture.

Personally, I don’t know what kind of “problems” the students have related to the Dutch culture, but one thing that I’ve always heard from students with an Asian culture is that they find Dutch people very direct, and this can sometimes be perceived by them as rude. But usually the students get used to the way of teaching here and they do not generally have many problems with the difference in teaching system anymore.

**S:** And what kind of support do you offer students who do have problems with the culture? There could be cases in which a student feels so much difference that he/she can feel isolated.

**A:** We do not have many cases where that happens, not with Asian exchange students at least. It is mostly that students who are here for a longer period of time experience those difficulties, like degree or international students. What we usually do when something like that occurs, we direct the students to the student counsellor. But when the students feel home sick or have serious difficulties in dealing with the Dutch culture, we try to connect them to other international students from other faculties. In order for them to feel better, it can be “refreshing” for these students to be able to connect with people that understand them and know how they feel.

**S:** Thank you so much for your time and information.

**A:** That was fine. If you need any other information don’t hesitate to contact me.

**S:** Thank you, I will.