



Case Study II: Rural Student's Needs and Tech in China



Pacific Ethnography
Beijing • Los Angeles • Pondicherry
+1 310 888 2813
info@paceth.com

A GLOBAL HARDWARE AND ENGINEERING FIRM needed a better understanding of one of China's largest emerging markets: young people in rural middle schools. Drawing on our prior global work in telecom, consumer electronics, and retail and on our team's deep experience with China's emerging cultures of consumption, we visited three remote communities. Ours was a multi-national and interdisciplinary team, including a small group of graduate students from Sichuan University. The team was led by business anthropologist Ken Erickson, CEO of Pacific Ethnography, and by anthropologists Jo Yung of Hong Kong and Ramanathan H. of Pondicherry, India. Our field-team included Xie Ming of Beijing and Ben Ross of Fuzhou.

The difficulties associated with distance from friends and family became key analytic touchstones in our work. Our team used multiple field-entry techniques to bridge special problems of access, regional languages, and student schedules. We obtained a robust sample of interviews and participant observation contexts.

We shared our team's ethnographic insights with our client and with one another via our project blog. Anthropologist Martin Høyem provided IT and analytic support for the team back in Los Angeles.

At the end of our work, we met with our client's team of designers, engineers, and researchers to review our shared understanding of the the desires, choices, and needs of Chinese middle school students. We uncovered key generational differences with design implications and helped steer the client away from an attractive but potentially costly and inappropriate sales context.

Our work with this client continues this fall, as we approach an even more difficult consumer group: young, low-income migrant laborers in major cities. Again, mobility, communication, and identity are all factors in our research. And the end result is collaborative design, new products, and market strategy.