

Submission type: Film for ACR Film Festival 2004

Title of paper: How Children in Rural China Become Consumers

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Content Area Codes (two to four, see Appendix A)*

Child/Adolescent Consumers; Consumer socialization; information search

Methodological Area Codes (one to three, see Appendix B)*

Case study; Ethnography; Other: personal interviews

Names of other co-authors and their affiliations

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Length of work: 25 minutes

Date of completion: December 2003

Original shooting format: mini-DV (Pal format)

Credits for the video: The work described in this video was fully supported by a Faculty Research Grant from the Hong Kong Baptist University (Project No. FRG/02-03/II-19).

One or more of the filmmakers will be present at the initial showing of the work if it is accepted.

How Children in Rural China Become Consumers

(Short Summary for program)

Since Premier Deng Xiaoping adopted the Open policy in 1979, the Chinese economy has been enjoying rapid growth. Although living standard and income in rural China have improved, they still lag behind their urban counterparts. In this video, we visited a rural village in Chengdu Sichuan in August 2003 and interviewed seven children aged nine to twelve. The video starts with an overview of different types of shops in the rural area and continues with interviews of children. We found that rural children have limited consumption experience compared to urban children and that they relied heavily on personal sources for new product information.

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(103 words)

How Children in Rural China Become Consumers

(Summary for proceedings)

China is the country with the largest children population in the world. As China's economy has been enjoying a rapid growth, companies have started to target Chinese Children as consumers. Of the approximately three hundred million children in China, about one-third of them, that is one hundred million, live in urban areas. The other two-thirds, that is about two hundred million children, live in the rural areas. Most consumer research has focused on urban children while ignoring the children in rural China. As a result, we have little knowledge about the consumption environment in rural China.

In this video, we visited a rural village in Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province in August 2003. Resembling other major cities in China, Chengdu city has many modern shops and consumer products. Advertising is highly visible in urban areas. Outdoor advertisements are common on bus panels, at bus stops, and outside the shops.

But the consumption environment in the rural area is very different from that of the urban counterpart. We paid a visit to Shou An Zhen, a village located seventy miles

away from Chengdu city. Shou An Zhen has a population of twenty-five thousand and its major economic activities are farming and fishing. It is connected to Chengdu by the newly built highway network. Here, we find little modern advertising. There is no regular bus service and very little outdoor advertising. Like most villages in China, Shou An Zhen has an open market. In two streets of less than five-minutes of walk, there are government offices, a clinic, a fresh produce market, a supermarket, and about seventy other retail shops.

The Rural Marketing and Sales Agency used to play an essential role in rural areas as it was the only national distribution network to sell agricultural and consumer products. Now, it is suffering from problems of low productivity, high deficits, outdated facilities, lack of cash flow, and lack of expertise. The video shows a sharp contrast between a Rural Marketing and Sales Agency and a nearby supermarket.

In order to explore the shopping experience of rural children in China, we interviewed seven children aged nine to twelve. A local marketing research company helped us to recruit the children and obtain permission from their parents to interview them. They were enjoying their summer holiday and there was no school during our visit.

Interviews were conducted at two of the children's homes, with the presence of the

executive from the market research company. We discussed their information sources about new products, their perception about usefulness and credibility of various commercial and non-commercial information sources, and their shopping experiences.

Results indicated that the shopping experience of rural children was very different from the urban children. Their consumption experience was limited. Their consumption needs were rather basic--for food, fun and study. Rural children relied heavily on personal sources for new product information, including teachers and parents. They perceived that personal sources were more useful and more credible than commercial sources. The current study indicates that rural children in China are still an untapped market.

(511 words)