

## My Experiences of ICT in China

ICT in China is not a culture, not like here. That's the biggest difference.

My first time using a computer at school was in 1993, my first year in junior high school. Before that time, I only touched PC in my father's office, where a magazine studio only possessed two. I can't remember the exact type of the PCs in my junior high—286 or 386 probably. They were introduced because we had one computer class per week, teaching us basic DOS, typing skills and document handling. The course was not graduation required, so I didn't really learn anything. At that time, computers for Chinese students were luxury stuffs. Our school got those PCs through sponsorship since it is the 3<sup>rd</sup> best school in Beijing. Other high schools simply had no resource to equip computers, let alone those in small cities and country side. However, for me, PCs were just things I didn't need.

3 years passed as quickly as lightening, I entered senior high at the same school. In a new computer course, we were taught about Windows 95 and some early software. Again, it's not an obligatory course, and I got no more knowledge than 3 years ago. My thought on PC only improved a little: it's much more interesting and helpful on calculating, but not useful on my homework.

But things changed so quickly: my classmates began to have PCs in their home after only 1 year, which was 1997. They began to talk about software, games, programming and so on; more and more printed media turned their attention to PC's future in China; big Hollywood movies with super computer special effects were imported; robots, WWW, e-mail, all kinds of new terms jumped out. I somehow realized that computers were complex, powerful and mysterious devices, but it's still far from my homework, as the ICT environment in my school didn't improve at all.

Another year passed, things changed again, as well as my recognition on PC. Some of my friend bought advanced PCs with Windows 98. We played games which were different from any game I played before; we used Word to type small articles; also, we used Internet. I began to fancy about PCs, willing to have one as well as Internet. In 1999, my last year in senior high, our school experimented an on-line class with a school in Shanghai: not an e-Learning class, just an Internet lived class. Although the ICT environment were still the same as before except some new PCs, students like me were all thinking about computers. At that time, computers with Pentium 3 processor were everywhere: in my friends' home, in my father's office (every one in their studio had a PC). Students used computers more as tools for printing, calculating and communicating (with friends). Our teachers used PCs in some classes, but not for communicating. Computers at school were only available for scheduled class. There's no Intranet, Blackboard—they were simply too advanced to suit in a high school.

In 1999, I entered university. The ICT environment had all the key features of what it

is now. We handed in works in disk or through e-mail; used computers at computer rooms freely; learned complex applications. Maybe because I lived in the capital and studied in good schools, I experienced almost all cutting edge ICT technologies before I went abroad. For those in small cities and rural areas, even now, they only get chances to know ICT after entering universities. Comparing to them, I'm definitely a lucky man.

The differences between ICT in Chinese universities and Dutch universities are trailing off. Most of them are non-technical difference: most Chinese universities don't have Apple PC since it's rare in China; printing (especially color printing) are expensive in China, so lots of students are still writing their reports; the number of PCs per student in China is much lower than it's in Holland because most of Chinese universities are financially weaker; the speed of upgrading is also slower in China which is another result of lack of fund; geographic differences among Chinese schools affect the quality of their ICT, while in the Netherlands it's not a problem. Technical differences are little: network management is similar; network connection type is the same, wiring technique is the same, etc. One significant difference is e-Learning development in China is much slower than here.

Considering the low awareness of e-Learning in China, students' ability to access Internet (only 5.2% of the population have Internet access) and school's finance status, e-Learning in China is still fighting its way out. Only in big cities and few universities are there some courses launched. Unfortunately in many parents' opinion, e-Learning is far from being mature, and its diploma is incomparable to conventional ones, which is the reason why even the student population is huge, e-Learning won't be able to acquire enough market. So for now, most of e-Learning courses are for the school's own students, or designed for company's employee development.

The problem facing ICT in China is not about how to catch up with the world, but how to spread its influence wider and deeper. At the time when ICT can be found in every school every city, we can say ICT in China is at the same level as those in the Netherlands, where it's a culture.