

社会焦点英语 读写教程

编著 杨新亮 段汉武 熊艳 柳旦



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前 言

英语学习过程中背景信息的缺失,会妨碍阅读技能的发展、语言的习得与强化,对于进入中高级阶段的语言学习者而言更是如此。因此,我们结合大学四六级考试、研究生入学考试、雅思考试等阅读和写作部分的真题情况及学生作文中存在的问题,编写了本教程。本教程旨在为学生提供熟悉的背景社会焦点阅读语篇,一方面弥补背景信息缺失造成的不足,另一方面为中高级英语学习者,尤其是非英语专业的学习者提供了解社会、思考现实的素材。利用学生对社会焦点的关注,可以增强学生读写的积极性和注意力,从而提高学生的学习效率。在熟悉的背景中用目的语思考现实问题,既丰富和强化了目的语语言知识,又能在语言思维过程中培养中国读者的写作和翻译技能。

本书依据现代认知心理学、认知语言学等方面的研究理论,系统地编排阅读语篇,科学地引导学生阅读社会焦点英语,从而丰富学习者的语言知识及其读、写、译技能。全书共 12 单元,每单元包括导读、重点提示、语篇阅读和练习等内容。导读部分从心理学和语言学的不同角度引导读者如何阅读语篇、如何掌握语篇系统知识、如何习得语境词汇和语篇的交际功能。重点提示提醒读者从哪些方面预测和掌握语篇信息及语言知识,依据同类语篇主题的一致性、编排的系统性、语料的充裕性和黑体连贯与衔接词汇的网络性强化语言的输入和输出。

一、本书的语篇选取、编排和导读等方面突出了以下特点:

(1) 语篇内容的选取和编排具有较强的系统性和科学性。所选内容涉及与中国社会相关的焦点语篇,并按同域主题进行编排。对反映语篇连贯和衔接的词汇项用黑体和斜体形式强调处理,提醒学生语篇和词汇网络性的关系,加强学生对词与篇的有机结构意识,提高学生阅读和学习的效率。

(2) 导读部分的提示和分析具有较强的指导性和实用性。该部分依据认知心理学、认知语言学等方面的理论研究,引导学生了解语言的篇章结构、成篇规律、语言习得的过程、语言知识的心理表征等,提醒读者掌握科学有效的阅读技巧,提高对语篇的理解能力。同时,结合历年社会考试中的真题,增强理论研究的应用性和推广价值。

本书为宁波大学外语学院范谊教授总主编的“浙江省高等教育‘十五’重点规划教材”和“浙江省高校人文社科重点研究基地(外国语言文化)大学英语教材丛书”之一,在编著过程中得到了宁波大学外语学院大学外语部诸多同事的指导和帮助,在此向他们表示由衷的感谢。

由于该书内容丰富,信息含量大,语料领域广泛,编写过程中难免有不妥之处,敬请读者批评指正。

宁波大学外语学院 段汉武

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Unit One | Concerns about the Disadvantaged or Unprivileged

导 读

阅读理解的三个层面或任务分别为语篇信息理解、语篇结构分析和语篇记忆。中国学生的精读、泛读大多集中于对语篇整体信息的理解,即掌握篇、段、句的大意,而忽略对语篇结构知识的分析和掌握。语篇的记忆往往被朗读课文、背单词所取代,很少有符合心理认知规律的语篇命题、概念、图式、故事、脚本等语义网络块的记忆,因而导致语篇与概念词的割裂。英汉“互译”式的词汇记忆方式、脱离汉文化“语境”的语篇学习和应用必然走向学与用的脱节,形成知识图式与语言思维之间的信息“空缺”。

因此,中高级阶段的语篇阅读应在理解信息的基础上,更多地关注英语篇章结构的理解和学习,更多地集中于篇的命题、概念网的联系性记忆,掌握英语篇章词、句、篇的相互关系,提高语言“篇”的交际能力。例如,本章的语篇主题为“关注弱势群体”,因而语篇的主概念表现为不同的词汇项:remote and underdeveloped ethnic villages, poverty-stricken areas, the impoverished people, the disadvantaged people, in abject poverty。问题 (issues and problems):poverty。原因 (causes): remote, backward education。对策 (countermeasures taken by the central and local governments): poverty relief, reduction, elimination, alleviation; food and clothing, out of poverty, capability-fostering, vocational education。

以此形成主题概念—相关问题—背景原因—对策的篇主题与分主题链,每项主题、分主题下又有相关的概念词项,从而形成主题图式篇的宏观结构和微观概念网。

作文真题

Directions: For this part, you are allowed 30 minutes to write an open letter? on behalf of the student union asking people to give help to a student who is seriously ill.

You should write at least 150 words following the outline given below:

1. 对病人的简单介绍:目前的病情和家庭情况
2. 目前的困难:无法继续承担医疗费用,需要护理
3. 希望捐助
4. 联系方式

语 篇 阅 读

Passage One

The Chinese government has **pledged to initiate another round of poverty alleviation**

reforms to help the country's 22 smallest ethnic groups **out of poverty** within five years. A total of 640 **remote and underdeveloped ethnic villages** will benefit from the campaign, according to a plan lately approved by the State Council, or the Chinese cabinet.

"As the main **battlefield** of the upcoming **poverty relief campaign**, these villages will experience efforts from both the central and local governments," said the Plan on Supporting the Development of Less-Population Ethnic Groups (2005 to 2010), which is supposed to **come into effect** later this year.

According to figures released by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, the population of each of the 22 small ethnic groups is below 100,000 and they total only about 630,000, accounting for less than half one thousandth of the country's population.

"The campaign will focus on **improving basic living conditions** and increasing incomes of farmers and herdsmen from these ethnic groups," said the commission. "And the villages, especially those who are still **facing food and clothing problems**, are supposed to be **helped out of poverty** earlier than those from non-ethnic regions."

With those in east China's Fujian province **as an exception**, all other residents of the ethnic groups live **in frontier areas** of the country's nine remote regions, including Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Yunnan. Some Chinese villagers even **share the same village** with foreign neighbors of the same minority.

However, despite all the difficulties, the ethnic groups did **make much progress** in past decades. Latest statistics released by the commission reveal that **the percapita Gross Domestic Product** (GDP) of China's five ethnic autonomous regions of Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, Xinjiang and Guangxi, where most residents of the country's key ethnic groups live, had for the first time topped 1,000 US dollars in 2004.

In comparison, the whole China reached that goal in 2003, with Inner Mongolia the same year and Xinjiang one year earlier. But the commission acknowledged the economic development level of the 22 ethnic groups still **lags far behind** the country's average, quoting unfavorable natural conditions.

There remain "many ethnic villages lack of power, highway, elementary school, clinics and even potable water" and "some ethnic groups in **poverty-stricken state** as a whole," it said, noting that one fourth of the population of the 22 groups still **suffer inadequate food and clothing supply**.

In order to form a **balanced development situation** nationwide, China commenced its historical West **Development Strategy** in 2000 which serves to help western ethnic groups shake off poverty. China has started 60 major projects since 2000 in its western part, with an approximate investment amount of 850 billion yuan (102 billion US dollars). In 2004, the fixed assets investment in the five regions soared 35.5 percent over that of the previous year.

"The fact that the per-capita GDP in the five regions has **surpassed** 1,000 US dollars has fully demonstrated that with guidance and help from the government, the ethnic areas

have significantly accelerated their development,” said deputy director of commission.

Different from some western countries, China has stressed more on construction and improvement of both the infrastructure and concepts among ethnic locals. Programs including free education and village-based broadcasting coverage are part of the ongoing bids designed to get more locals **acquainted with the outside world** and accessed to more knowledge.

“This form of government support of ‘**capability-fostering**’ rather than ‘**aid-giving**’ **style** has made it possible for the ethnic groups to shake off poverty at the very root,” said a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The government’s practical ideas have started to pay off after decades of promotion.

A CASS researcher is a woman known as the first doctor from the ethnic group, which had existed as a hunting people of **primitive society** decades ago. “As a group even without a writing system, the Oroqen people had suffered a lot. They didn’t have **decent education** before the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. But things are totally different today.”

Local governments have helped residents of her village **carry out a series of education programs** and sent technicians out there spreading planting, processing and other skills. Some of our local products are sold quite well in domestic markets.

A professor on ethnicity attributes the latest development of some ethnic groups mainly to government policies that are growing more concrete and scientific and the country’s long-standing concept of “all ethnic groups belong to one family”, which has **penetrated** through every corner of Chinese society.

According to the Chinese tradition, members of a family should help each other and share comforts and hardships. The concept has not only helped the nation **to maintain harmonious relations** among different ethnic groups but will also ensure the country’s **ambitious poverty elimination campaign** successful in the end.

According to the commission, the Chinese government is considering introducing more helpful and practical measures **to help solve economic, social, culture, education and other problems** the 22 ethnic groups are facing. We are very confident that the country will **render them a rich and happy life finally**.

Passage Two

Six hundred yuan (US \$ 72.3) is not a big sum, but it **means the world** to a poor 39-year-old villager from a township in Southwest China’s Chongqing. On February 10 last year, her family were thrown into **poverty** by unexpected hospital costs from the difficult delivery of her first child. Fortunately, the China Foundation for **Poverty Alleviation** (CFPA) gave her **a helping hand** by providing a 600 yuan subsidy.

In 2004, the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) provided various **subsidies** for 2,891 pregnant women and saved 17 poor mothers whose lives were in danger at **child delivery** through the Maternal and Infant Health Project launched by CFPA.

The CFPA collected 112 million yuan (US \$ 13.5 million) in **charity funding** and material in 2004 to directly benefit 458,500 people living in poverty, vice-president of the NGO said yesterday at the first conference of CFPA's Fifth Council.

Besides the mother and infant project, the foundation also launched a **micro-finance project** to provide financial support and technical training to poor households, a "New Great Wall Project" to help poor university students, a **disaster relief project** and "Project Angel" to improve building services for hospitals in poor regions.

More than 1.8 million people have benefited from the CFPA's instant aid projects since its founding in 1997, said CFPA's former President. Meanwhile, **poverty alleviation** remains an arduous and long-term task for China not only because there are still 26.1 million people living in poverty but also because those who have **shaken off poverty** are prone to becoming poor again.

In 2004, the rural population living in **abject poverty** with an annual income of less than 668 yuan (US \$ 80.5) decreased by 2.9 million, while those with an income of less than 924 yuan (US \$ 111) decreased by 6.4 million, said director of the Leading Group Office of **Poverty Alleviation and Development** under the State Council. But this is only half the story.

For the nearly 100 million people who live just **above the benchmark of poverty**, accidental changes, such as disease, would put them back into poverty again. It is a **strategic mission** for the nation to reverse the ideas of the rural poor.

People from all walks of life should be **mobilized to combat poverty**. And the NGOs could also play a crucial role that will speed up the government's effort in this regard.

Speaking at a national anti-poverty conference last week, the director said China has focused on **poverty alleviation** of one village after another, the training of migrant workers and the acceleration of the industrialization process.

He also disclosed that the central government will **allocate** 13 billion yuan (US \$ 1.6 billion) in financial funds this year with governments at all levels **to earmark corresponding funds** to help fight against poverty.

Passage Three

Despite the country's **booming economic development** in the past two decades, 90 million Chinese residents still live **under the internationally recognized poverty line**, Minister of Commerce said Friday.

By that standard, an average daily income of one US dollar per person, the 90 million Chinese residents, including 75.8 million rural residents, **earn an average percapita annual income** of less than 924 yuan (112 US dollars) in terms of **purchasing price parity**.

Addressing a meeting of the Association For Underdeveloped Regions in China, the minister said 22 million urban residents live on **minimum living allowance** from the governments. Citing figures from the National Bureau of Statistics, the ministers said 26 million

Chinese rural live in **abject poverty**. Nearly 50 million are low-income earners who may **fall back into deep poverty** in the case of a natural calamity or personal misfortune, such as fatal illness.

China, which has a total population of 1.3 billion, has **set its poverty line** at an annual average income of 668 yuan (81 US dollars). Some overseas commentators have said China is no longer a developing country, which is simply not true.

China's per capita gross domestic product just **exceeded** 1,200 US dollars last year, while that of developed countries **surpassed** 20,000 US dollars. His ministry will help the country's poor areas develop economically by improving their **access to domestic and overseas markets** and facilitating financial and technical assistance from overseas through multinational or bilateral cooperation.

The ministry is going to **project a true picture** of China's situation in poverty reduction to the international community. China's fast economic development, which **stands at** 9.4 per cent during 1978 and 2004, has helped reduce the country's poor population dramatically.

According to Chinese statistics, the population in **abject poverty** was reduced from 250 million to 26 million during 1978 and 2004. The ratio of the very poor to the total rural population has been reduced from 30.7 percent to 3.1 percent.

But head of the State Council Leading Group Office of **Poverty Alleviation** and Development said helping the remaining poor **out of poverty** in the coming two decades will be a **tough job** for China. Most of the poor rural people live in remote or hilly areas with **harsh living conditions**.

A professor with Beijing University said the Chinese Government should increase its spending on **poverty reduction**, make education resources available to young people from the poor areas and create more jobs for **the impoverished people**. In addition, China should **raise its allowance** for the very poor to at least 1,000 yuan (121 US dollars), which may cost the Central Government an additional 30 billion yuan (3.65 billion US dollars).

China's budget revenues increased by 25 percent to 2.6 trillion yuan last year (317 billion US dollars) meaning that the government will be able to give further support to the poor. Helping the poor through increased budget spending is in line with the leadership's policies for a **fair, just and harmonious society**.

Passage Four

Nearly 90 percent of China's provinces and autonomous regions have **exempted agriculture taxes**. But the 900 million Chinese farmers are yet to feel happy about **the tax exemption** as problems, including those about **money-thirsty** compulsory education and financially weak governments at county and town level, are **cropping up** in rural areas across the nation.

China's **taxation reform** has entered a new stage, in which major efforts are devoted to **promote renovations of** township institutions, rural compulsory education system and of **the**

fiscal regime of county-and-town-level governments, said the Premier at a recent national working conference on rural taxation reform.

Only when **the aforesaid problems** in the post-agriculture-tax era are solved and there is no **arbitrary fundraising** upon farmers, will China's rural taxation reform be regarded as effective and successful, experts on agricultural problems believed.

Prior to the taxation reform meeting, the Premier said in his government work report at the annual session of China's top legislature in early March that the Central Government will **earmark** 39.6 billion yuan (4.8 billion US dollars) to support local governments in their **rural taxation reform**, and **allocate** 10 billion yuan (1.2 billion US dollars) from the state's **risk fund** for grain production **to subsidize farmers**.

China began **levying agriculture tax** in 1958 and has since remained one of a few nations that **impose such tax** in the world. Such tax used to stand at some 50 billion yuan (6.02 billion US dollars), or 3 percent of China's total annual **tax revenues**, before the rural taxation reform started.

This year, as most of the provinces and autonomous regions **abandoned agriculture tax**, the tax revenue will **reduce to** 1.5 billion yuan (180.7 million US dollars) or so, down 93 percent from the year-earlier level.

In the wake of tax reduction and exemption in rural areas, governments at the county, town and township level, however, have been **weakened financially**. Usually undertaking public services in the areas, now they have more **meagre treasuries** to support rural compulsory education and build infrastructure projects and other facilities for public good.

Take northeast China's Heilongjiang and eastern Anhui provinces, which are two representative agricultural production bases in China, as examples: **Liabilities** at every village stand at 1 million yuan (120,482 US dollars) on average in Heilongjiang, and those at each township, 4 million yuan (481,928 dollars) on average. The figures are more than 200,000 yuan (24,096 dollars) and 8 million yuan (963,855 dollars) in the province.

According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, **debts at township and village level** stand at scores of billions yuan nationwide.

"We often receive court summons as we have several million yuan in debt," said a local party leader. "Before the taxation reform, the township government could **garner** two million yuan (240,694 dollars) every year. Now we have only less than one million yuan (120,482 dollars) **allocated** by the Central Government. We are incapable of **repaying our debts**, needless to say building roads and water conservancy facilities for the farmers."

At a Township Middle School in Anhui Province, eight out of its **shabby school houses** have been **discarded**, with spider webs hanging on their **eaves**. The principal said, "The annual work fund of 10,000 yuan (1,205 dollars) simply cannot **cover our expense**. And we wouldn't ask students' parents to pay more."

According to government **think tanks**, more than 50 percent of rural primary and middle schools report **fund default** currently. "After the rural taxation reform, rural compulsory

education system faced the worst difficulty,” said head of the rural department under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

To solve the problems, **renovation of fiscal regimes** in rural areas are being carried out. The money used by townships is now managed by related county governments in some provinces. In some areas that conditions are ready, the Central Government allows a provincial government directly to administer related counties in financial arrangements. Thus the money the Central Government **allocates** to support local governments will be used more efficiently.

Some government officials revealed that the Central government will **tie up with** provincial governments to undertake rural liabilities left over from past. The Central and provincial governments should pay more money to ensure rural compulsory education.

Currently, **tax revenue** grows 500-600 billion yuan (60.2-72.3 billion US dollars) annually in China. The Chinese Government is financially powerful enough **to implement free, compulsory education in rural areas**, according to economists from the Asian Development Bank China office.

Passage Five

China has begun taking steps **to deal with its increasing number of homeless children**, an official announced at a national conference on protecting **street children** here Sunday.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs estimates that there are at least 150,000 homeless children **wandering the country's cities**, most from **underdeveloped rural areas**, said deputy director of the ministry social welfare office at the conference.

Most of these children are suffering from **inadequate daily necessities** and have no chance to receive normal education, which leaves **a life-long negative impact** on their physical and psychological health. Some of them even become criminals.

Poverty and a breakdown in the family structure are the two major **contributing causes** of the country's rise in homeless children, said a representative of the China Office of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Economic and social reform has indeed **benefited** many in China, but **the human cost** of such a rapid transformation has been **increased pressure on individuals and families** — a growing migrant population, a higher divorce rate and a growing gap between poor and rich and between rural and urban residents and those in different regions — all of these are pushing our children from their families to the streets.

The representative's words are **borne out** by the story of an 11-year-old.

Before being placed in **a government-run protection Centre** for street children in Guangzhou in the summer of 2004, the boy wandered for more than two years from city to city in the south. He ran away from his **abusive parents** in 2002, the year the farming family moved to Xiamen, a coastal city in southeastern Fujian Province, from a poor village in southwestern Chongqing Municipality.

“They often beat me and I don’t know why. Now I’m afraid of going back home and I don’t think they have ever tried to find me,” said the boy **in a matter-of-fact way**. “The teachers in the Centre are really nice to me and I do not want to leave them.”

Before coming to the Centre, the boy slept outdoors with his friends and made a living by selling soda cans or polishing shoes. His experience is a typical and **heart-breaking example**.

The tsunami that **hit south and southeast Asia** in last December left thousands of children homeless. Fortunately, they have received **timely aid** from the international society. But we should never forget that a ‘soundless tsunami’ — **violence, abuse, drugs and sexual exploitation** — is killing many street children too, including those from China. They have the need and also the right to get our immediate attention.

Sending street children back home is the first choice of Chinese **aid institutions**. Those who can’t find their homes or who are reluctant to go back home, are sent to child welfare houses, **foster families** or **special protection Centres** where they receive special education and **vocational training** to help **integrate them into society**.

China opened its first **pilot protection Centre** for street children in 1995. By 2003, the Chinese government had spent more than 120 million yuan (14.46 million US dollars) to establish more than 130 special **protection Centres** providing short-term protection and education for street kids in China’s cities. They have helped more than 10,000 children, said vice minister of the Civil Affairs. The children are **tutored** at the Centres, and those who do well on tests are sent to normal schools.

China has begun **drafting its first special law** on the protection of homeless children. A set of regulations on **offering shelters and assistance** to **vagrants** in cities took effect in the August of 2003. The regulations have specific stipulations on **the responsibilities and measures** government organs should take in helping **street kids**.

“We are glad to see that the Chinese government is working to help homeless children, issuing the special regulations on vagrants in 2003, which is really a milestone event in street children protection work in China,” said deputy director-general of the “Save the Children UK China Program.”

China plans to build more **protection institutions** for street children while strengthening cooperation with some international organizations, such as UNICEF and Save the Children UK. We still have many things to do, but we can’t just wait for help. Action should start today.

Passage Six

Female migrant workers in Harbin frequently face **violations of their working rights**, according to a survey by the Women’s Federation of Harbin. There are more than 650,000 migrant workers **flowing into** the city in Heilongjiang Province annually, and women make up 35 per cent of their number.

"**The legal rights** of women migrant workers are often and easily violated at present," director of the Harbin Legal Affairs Office told *China Daily*. **Their ignorance of basic legal knowledge** and comparably low education level put them **in a vulnerable position**.

A woman came to work **as a hairdresser in a beauty salon** in Harbin from her hometown shortly after Spring Festival. One of her customers developed **an allergic reaction** to a treatment she had administered, and demanded compensation from the salon. She was blamed by her boss and fired **with a deduction of** a month's salary.

Elsewhere in Harbin, a 22-year-old waitress in a hotel resigned because of **frequent harassment** from her boss. These two are just **typical cases of the situation** of the women migrant workers. Among the 900 female migrant workers surveyed, nearly 80 per cent were educated to junior middle school level or below. Many of them do not have **any legal labor documents** with their employers and just work under an oral agreement. Nearly 60 per cent surveyed said they did not have any kind of labor documents.

"Some employers **took advantage of their anxiety** to get a job and employ them under oral agreements, but the employers could **optionally change the agreement** or deny its existence," said a **pollster** from the Women's Federation.

Payment default, illegal overtime working and a general **lack of social insurance** are the main problems reflected in the survey. Just before Spring Festival, the federation received **complaints** from three female migrant workers whose boss had refused to pay them for three months of work in a hotel.

As no written labor document was signed, the federation contacted the Harbin Municipal Labor Bureau at once. After several investigations, the boss finally agreed to pay them **under pressure** from the Labor Bureau.

The three women were lucky to have their salaries, but not all of the women migrant workers are that fortunate. The Women's Federation recently **teamed up with two local legal affairs offices** to open two service centres to provide free **legal consultation** for female migrant workers. Three **hotlines** have been set up.

"We hope more and more women migrant workers will **take up the weapon of law** to protect their legal rights through our promotion," said vice-president of the Women's Federation. "We are also **craving a complete and effective labour surveillance system** to build up a better environment for the migrant labourers."

Passage Seven

Serious default on wage payment should be **listed as an offence** in an effort **to bar corporate executives from** doing such things, proposed a Chinese lawmaker on Tuesday.

"**The chronic problem of wage defaulting encroaches upon** the property rights of rural laborers and is **prone to triggering unrest, desperate actions and social unrest**," said a deputy to the National People's Congress (NPC), during the ongoing annual NPC session.

It's unfair that an employee is **deemed as a criminal** if he illegally takes 20,000 yuan

(about 2,410 US dollars) of corporate property as his own under existing laws and regulations, but companies are free and **unchecked** from legal accountabilities even when they **default on the payment of** millions or even tens of millions of yuan of wages.

That's a **loophole in the legal system** that has to be filled to **intensify** the protection of the **disadvantaged** people.

Million upon million of migrant laborers have had a hard time in getting back their **defaulted wages**, with the sum estimated at nearly 100 billion yuan (some 12 billion dollars) annually in recent years. So the rural laborers working in cities are hit hardest.

The State Council, the central government, last year **launched an** **amass drive** to get back **defaulted wages** for rural migrant laborers in the field of construction, which **reclaimed a combined sum** of 33.1 billion yuan (some 4 billion US dollars).

Passage Eight

What is a **typical Chinese farmer** like? Someone **bending down low** in the fields, **sweating** in the scorching sun, with a white towel bound around his forehead if he lives in the central plains of the country?

A farmer in an east China's village would **shake his head** at such a picture, speeding through the fields in his Mercedes-Benz. Three airlines have set up offices in the village with a population of 4,000 here in Jiangsu Province, as the "farmers" **jet around the country** selling optical fibres produced by their jointly-owned enterprise.

"Rice fields in the village are all **rented to migrants** from the northern part of Jiangsu. A capable local man can have a house built within two years by **selling optical fibres**, so why should we labour in the fields?" said a villager who is following **the latest local fashion of rebuilding the roof** of his three-storey house into something of a Goethe style.

A family of migrant farmers usually **rents the rice fields** of 10 or more local families, to whom they provide all the grain they need **in lieu of rent**. The local "farmers" only care for **their small patches of vegetable fields**.

The millionaire villagers may be extreme cases among the 768 million farmers in various parts of China, but their tales show how **living standards vary**, according to a researcher at the Rural Economy Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The rich-poor gap between farmers in the east and west has been expanding in the past few years, and **the trend** is probably to continue in the next decade at least. The richest farmers live in rural areas of Shanghai and Beijing, and in the eastern Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces, while the poorest are found in southwest Guizhou Province and the northwest provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi.

A farmer, who **plants vegetables, grapes and watermelons** in the Daxing District of Beijing, said his family earned more than 20,000 yuan (US \$ 2,400) last year by selling his produce in urban areas and even to Japan. An **urbanite** by residency registration, he **married a rural woman** during the "cultural revolution" (1966 - 1976) and has stayed there ever

since. The life of a successful farmer like himself is better than that of a **mediocre factory worker** in the city.

But the farmer has his worries. A property developer has recently bought, with government approval, land at a nearby village. It will **compensate local farmers** with a **lump-sum**, and he is afraid that he may lose his land one day. But a farmer of Meixian County, Baoji of northwest China's Shaanxi Province has little to worry about.

The farmer is one of the richest in his village — in 2003 he **swung his hoe onto the ground** and a cave appeared with **three-millennia-old** bronzes in it. He and his four companions informed the authorities and were each awarded 10,000 yuan (US \$ 1,200).

He pledged that he would **treat his family to a meat feast** when he got the money. The villagers usually only have meat twice a year. A meal with meat costs two days' living expenses for my child, and the child needs new clothes and will go to school in a few years — how can we **swallow the meat** bearing all this in mind?

His family earned about 1,500 yuan (US \$ 181) by **planting wheat and beans** in 2003, which constituted a quarter of the family's income that year, while meat fetched 12 yuan (US \$ 1.50) per kilogram. The rest of the family's income came from the farmer's **part-time job as a welder**.

A 62-year-old concluded that a rural family couldn't depend solely on farming to have a decent life. A farmer from central China's Hunan Province **rents his land** to one of the few young men in the village and lives mainly on money from his son working in Beijing. The young people have all left for cities and only the old and children stay back. I wish to see in my life that one day the whole family will live together and lead a **well-to-do** life on our old land.

Passage Nine

A recent Chinese **blockbuster** "A World without Thieves" is based on **the experiences of a young migrant worker** carrying 60,000 yuan (US \$ 7,228) on a train packed with thieves. But while the image of a **warm-hearted** but somewhat **naive migrant worker** may have made film fans **chuckle**, it's a sure bet that most of China's migrant workers are yet to step into a cinema to admire their **big-screen equivalent**.

"Forty yuan (US \$ 4.90) a ticket? I can't afford it," said a migrant worker at a construction site in east Beijing. He found it hard **to recall** when he last watched a film, or what it was about. "It must be 10 years ago."

Though they are the builders of the nation's theatres and cinemas, a **limited cultural life** is common among China's 120 million **migrant workers**. He arrived from east China's Zhejiang Province in 1991. Life was better then; money seemed to come more easily. Now, as more and more workers are **rushing to the capital**, it's too hard to earn money, and none of us dare think about watching films.

For many, the dream is earning enough to pay for their children's education so they can