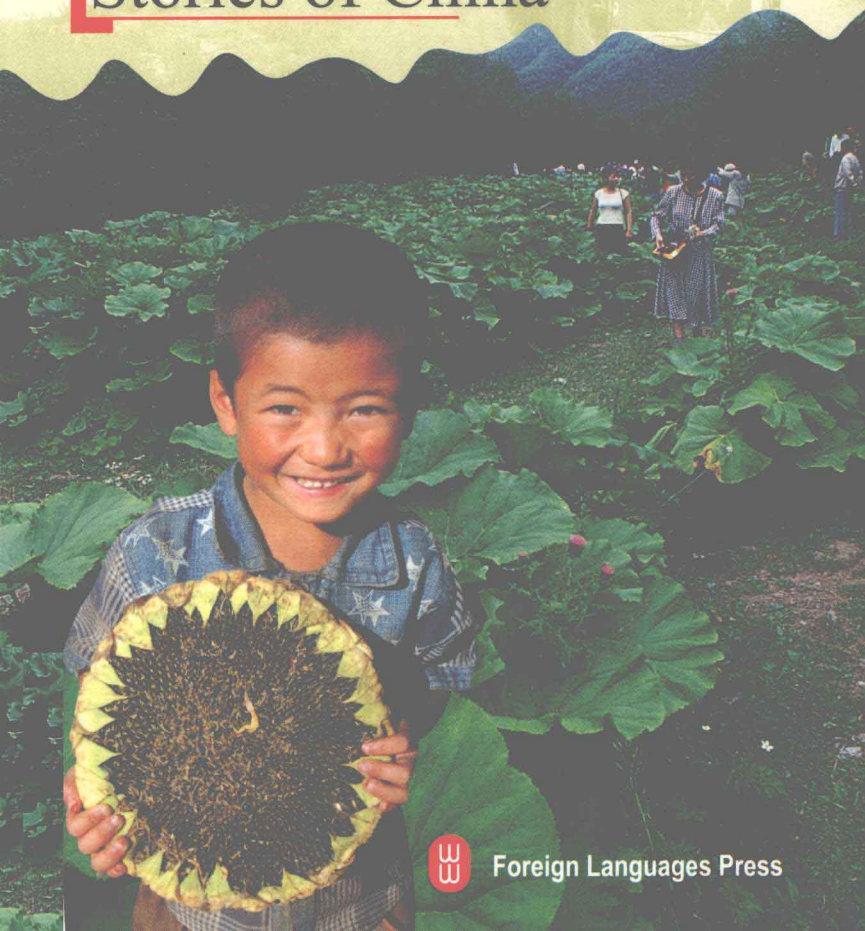


CHINA

Rising Out of Poverty

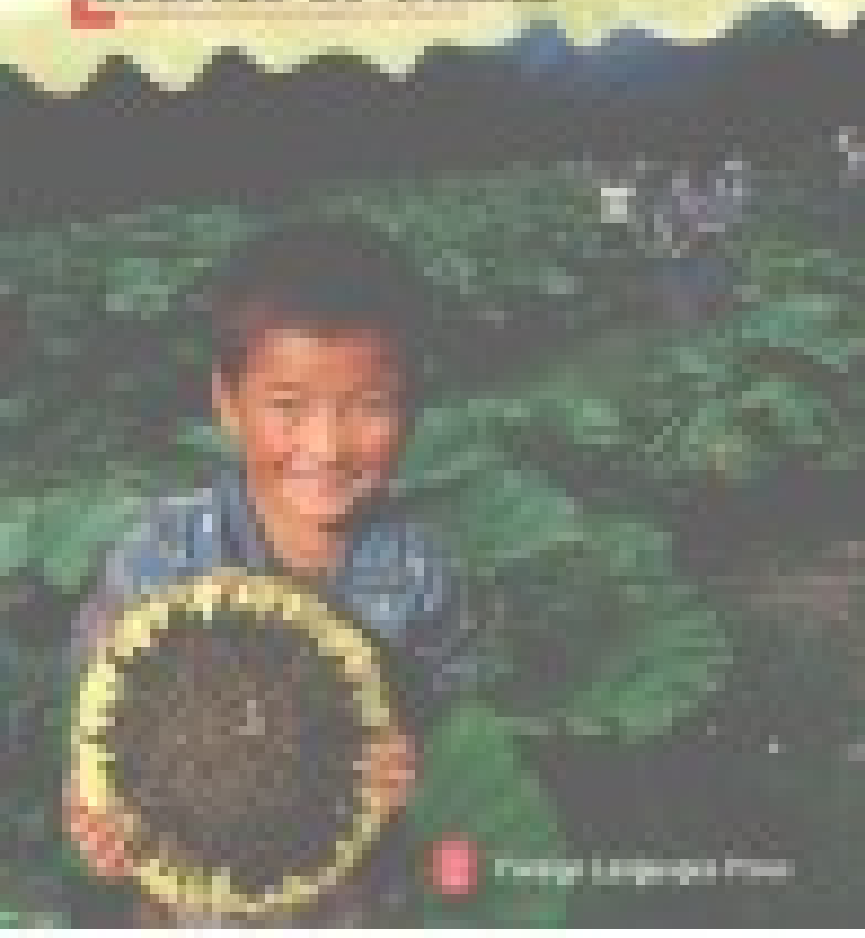
Stories of China



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Rising Out of Poverty

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▲ Taoketu and village children.

One day in the summer of 2005, Taoketu paid another visit to Laohugou (Tiger Ditch) Village, which is located deep in the Liupan Mountains in the southern tip of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. This was one of his countless visits to this small village.

As a journalist with *Ningxia Pictorial* since 1995, he has visited this village frequently and everything here is very familiar with him. Laohugou Village is virtually cut off from the outside world and its children have to walk two hours along winding paths to the local school. The village is home to 70 households, with 60 percent of the villagers illiterate. The barren land here



is often plagued by various disasters and there is only one well. Bread and potatoes are the only available foods and sometimes, even the staple food runs out. With an annual per-capita income of \$100, this village is among the most impoverished in Jingyuan County in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region.

The helpless stares of the villagers haunted Taoketu every time he returned home in the city of Yinchuan. The mere thought of the hard life in the village kept him awake night after night and even reduced this powerfully built Mongolian man to tears. A deep friendship had grown between him and the villagers and their future left him worried.

► Twelve-year-old Wang Xiaoniu wears worn-out cloth shoes with his toes sticking out throughout the year.

◄ The Pudong New Area in Shanghai, with clusters of high-rise buildings, is called "Oriental Manhattan."



If only some day their struggles could end and they too could enjoy the life of farmers in the southeast region of the country!

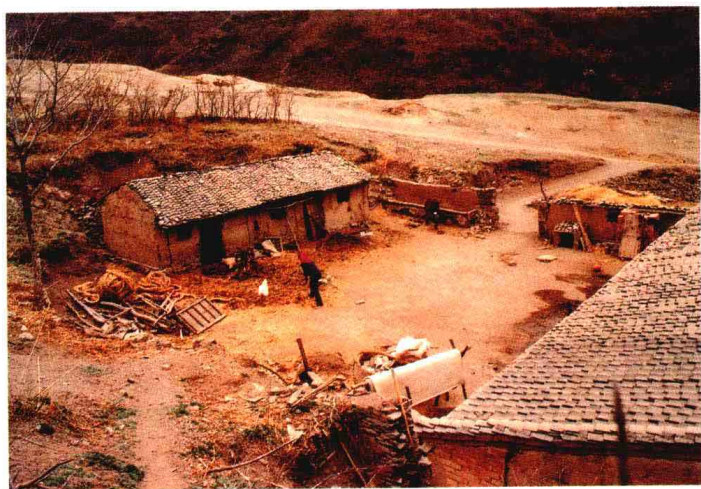
However, that summer day he is feeling cheery as the Development and Reform Commission of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region has implemented a poverty alleviation plan that involves moving the whole village to the irrigated area of the Yellow River to the north. Taoketu sees himself being rid of the haunted stares of the villagers. Thinking of this, he quickened his steps. At the entrance to the village, Tao met Wang Xiaoniu, a 12-year-old boy in the fifth grade of the local primary school. Wang's family has five people and little land and life is hard. The kid had asked Taoketu again and again when his village would be included in the resettlement plan by the Development and Reform Commission. Dire poverty had driven the villagers to the brink of desperation. Life beyond the mountains was beckoning them. The resettlement plan was like a beacon of light in the dark night.

"Mr. Taoketu, when can we move out?" asks Wang eagerly. Seeing the child's tattered cloth shoes, Taoketu could not help feeling sad. "Soon! soon!" he answered, with some confidence.

A Typical Example

Laohugou Village is a typical example of poverty-stricken areas in Ningxia or even around China. To tell the truth, there are a great many such poor villages in the mountainous areas in southern Ningxia. Of the total population of 2 million in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, 980,000 live in poverty, with more than 250,000 in absolute poverty. In 1978, China had 250 million people struggling with poverty.

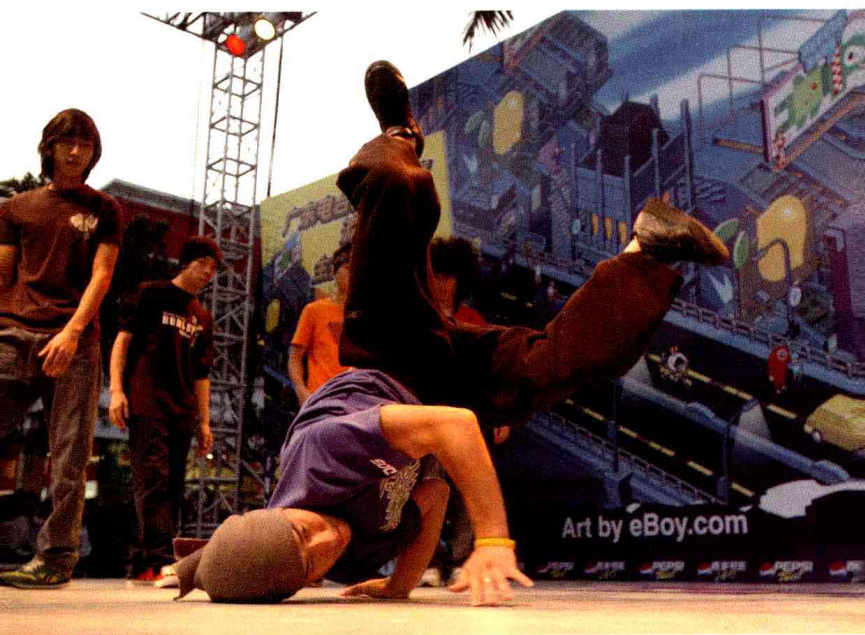
Life in villages such as Laohugou Village used to be pictured often in Western media reports 20 years ago – low and dilapidated houses and people in tattered clothes. In the two decades since China initiated reform and opening-up in 1978, such reports have gradually disappeared in Western media and the focus has gradually shifted to China's growing riches, seemingly in-





- ▲ In the downtown area of Shanghai, towering buildings stand in great numbers, and neon lights make the night as bright as the day.
- ◀ A house in Binggou Village. Such a tumbledown and desolate scene is depressing.

tended to create, for Western readers, an image that the Chinese people all have got rich overnight. Photographs of high-rise buildings in Shanghai's Pudong Area, which is extolled as an "Oriental Manhattan," are seen frequently in mainstream Western publications, and people tend to view Pudong as epitomizing the whole of China



▲ Avant-garde young people in Shenzhen perform globally popular street dances.

and forget the fact that most areas are still poor all over the country. These reports have contributed to a misunderstanding of the reality in China today – the fact that China is a developing country in every sense. In China, like other developing countries, affluence and development are accompanied by poverty and backwardness. Foreigners only see the high-rise buildings and neon lamps in the cities but seldom see the shabby houses in the backward areas. Even as pretty city girls pick up expensive Paris fashions without any hesitation, there

are schoolgirls in the countryside worrying about not having decent clothes for the next season. The unbalanced development of rural and urban areas is fueling the disparity between the rich and the poor, and such a situation will go on to exist for a long time to come in a developing country like China.

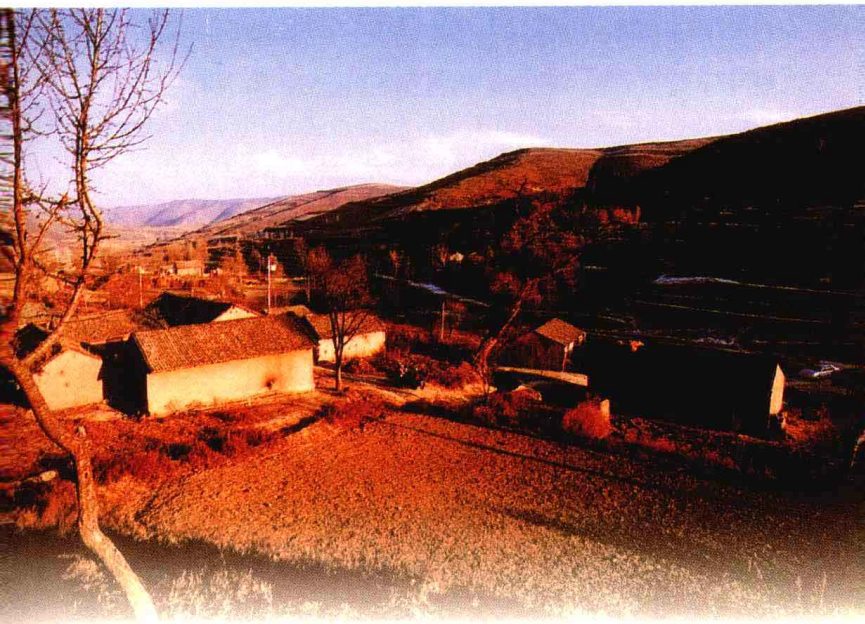
Coming back to Ningxia, hometown of Wang Xiaoni. The past two decades have seen relatively fast development in this region thanks to the policy of re-

▼ At Dadian Village in Yuanzhou District, Guyuan City, 10-year-old Zhao Yali (center) and her two-year-old sister Zhao Yaxue (left) help their mother pick beans.



Cities and Counties in Ningxia





▲ The ecological environment of Laohu (Tiger) Village where Wang Xiaoni lives is deteriorating.

form and opening up initiated by Deng Xiaoping. The northern part of this region, the famous irrigated area along the Yellow River and the direct beneficiary of this river, has made great progress and stands in direct contrast to the south. Also known as Xihaigu in administrative divisions, southern Ningxia covers an area of 30,400 square km; it is home to 2.52 million people, among whom 1.19 million are of Hui ethnic group, making up 65 percent of the whole Hui population in the autonomous region. Unlike the irrigated area in the