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China increases spending on rural poor

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Contents

The Article	2
Warm-ups	3
Before Reading / Listening	4
While Reading / Listening	5
Listening Gap Fill	6
After Reading	7
Discussion	8
Speaking	9
Homework	10
Answers	11

6 March, 2006

THE ARTICLE

China increases spending on rural poor

China's government has decided to start helping the poor Chinese who live in the countryside. There is a huge difference in income between people in cities, who are richer, and the millions of farmers, who are much poorer. Premier Wen Jiabao opened parliament yesterday with promises of massive spending to keep the country folk happy. He plans to put money in their pockets by ending agricultural taxes. He also increased spending on education in rural areas. He said this would help narrow the income gap that threatens social stability. He also said China's farmers could help China become the world's largest economy.

Wen Jiabao put helping China's poor high on his agenda, saying: "We need to...work to [redirect] investments by shifting the government's priority in...investment to the countryside." Once the rural poor start spending, the economy should take off. Sixty percent of China's population lives in the countryside. However, their income is just one third of those in cities. The Premier stressed the importance of his plans, stating: "This is a change of epoch-making significance." Mr. Wen will be helped by an economic growth rate of more than nine percent per annum.

WARM-UPS

1. SPENDING: Your government will spend lots of money on making your country better. Write down three areas you think this money should be spent on. Tell these to your partner(s). Discuss which things are most important.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

China / poor people / the countryside / farmers / money / pockets / social stability / economic growth / agendas / investment / the economy / important plans

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. DIFFERENCES: Are there great differences between people in your country? Talk about these with your partner(s).

- Income divide
- Digital divide
- North-South (geographic) divide
- Racial divide
- Caste system
- Sexual inequality
- Educational divide
- Religious divide
- English language divide
- Other

4. INVESTMENT: In pairs / groups, put the following in order of which you think is most important for government spending:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| _____ Kindergarten education | _____ Safer roads |
| _____ AIDS research | _____ Increased pensions |
| _____ Sports promotion | _____ Military spending |
| _____ Wildlife preservation | _____ Rural infrastructure |

5. TWO-MINUTE DEBATES: Have these following fun debates with your partners. Students A agree with the first argument; students B, with the second. Change partners often:

- Living in the countryside is best. Vs. Living in the city is best.
- The countryside is best for kids growing up. Vs. The city is best for kids.
- The countryside is not important. Vs. The countryside is very important.
- Country folk are boring. Vs. Country folk are very interesting.
- Cities are our future. Vs. Cities will destroy the future of many people.
- Government money should be spent on rural areas. Vs. Cities need money.
- The countryside smells lovely. Vs. The countryside smells bad.
- The slow pace of the country is best. Vs. The fast pace of the city is best.

6. RURAL: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "rural". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. China's leader will move millions of China's poor into the countryside. T / F
- b. The leader announced new spending to keep farmers happy. T / F
- c. He said he would increase agricultural taxes. T / F
- d. A digital divide threatens social stability in China. T / F
- e. Wen Jiabao put helping China's poor high on his agenda. T / F
- f. The Chinese economy will never take off. T / F
- g. The Premier stressed the importance of his plans. T / F
- h. Mr. Wen will be helped by runaway economic growth. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| a. helping | countryside |
| b. huge | people |
| c. folk | historical |
| d. rural | changing |
| e. narrow | reduce |
| f. agenda | earnings |
| g. shifting | aiding |
| h. income | year |
| i. epoch-making | massive |
| j. annum | list |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| a. start helping the poor Chinese | than nine percent per annum |
| b. a huge difference | of massive spending |
| c. promises | that threatens social stability |
| d. put money in their pockets by | the government's priority |
| e. help narrow the income gap | in income |
| f. high | the economy should take off |
| g. shifting | of those in cities |
| h. Once the rural poor start spending, | who live in the countryside |
| i. their income is just one third | ending agricultural taxes |
| j. an economic growth rate of more | on his agenda |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

China increases spending on rural poor

China's government has _____ to start helping the poor Chinese who live in the countryside. There is a _____ difference in income between people in cities, who are richer, and the millions of farmers, who are much poorer. Premier Wen Jiabao _____ parliament yesterday with promises of _____ spending to keep the country folk happy. He plans to put money in their _____ by ending agricultural taxes. He also increased spending on education in _____ areas. He said this would help _____ the income gap that threatens social _____. He also said China's farmers could help China become the world's largest economy.

pockets
huge
massive
stability
decided
narrow
opened
rural

Wen Jiabao put helping China's poor _____ on his agenda, saying: "We need to...work to [_____] investments by shifting the government's _____ in...investment to the countryside." Once the rural poor _____ spending, the economy should take off. Sixty percent of China's _____ lives in the countryside. However, their income is just one third of those in cities. The Premier _____ the importance of his plans, stating: "This is a change of epoch-making significance." Mr. Wen will be _____ by an economic growth rate of more than nine percent per _____.

stressed
priority
annum
start
helped
high
population
redirect

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

China increases spending on rural poor

China's government has decided _____ helping the poor Chinese who live in the countryside. There is a _____ difference in income between people in cities, who are richer, and the _____ of farmers, who are much poorer. Premier Wen Jiabao opened parliament yesterday with _____ of massive spending to keep the country folk happy. He plans to put money in their _____ by ending agricultural taxes. He also increased spending on education in _____ areas. He said this would help narrow the income gap that threatens social stability. He also said China's farmers could help China become the world's largest _____.

Wen Jiabao put helping China's poor high on his _____, saying: "We need to...work to [redirect] investments by _____ the government's priority in...investment to the countryside." Once the rural poor start spending, the economy should _____ . Sixty percent of China's population lives in the countryside. However, their _____ is just one third of those in cities. The Premier _____ the importance of his plans, stating: "This is a change of epoch-making significance." Mr. Wen will be helped by an economic _____ rate of more than nine percent per _____.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'growth' and 'rate'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "COUNTRYSIDE" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about the countryside and city.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- start
- huge
- massive
- pockets
- gap
- largest
- agenda
- priority
- take off
- third
- stressed
- per

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of the Chinese Premier's plans?
- c. Is there a big difference in wealth where you're from?
- d. How important is the countryside to your country's economy?
- e. Does your government spend enough money on rural areas?
- f. What image do farmers and country folk have in your country?
- g. Are people moving back to the countryside in your country?
- h. What things in your country are likeliest to lead to social instability?
- i. What are relations like between rural folk and city dwellers in your country?
- j. What big plans do you have?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. How will the world change if China becomes the strongest economy?
- d. What will happen in China if its rural population becomes rich?
- e. What kind of economic relationship does your country have with China?
- f. What do you think of Chinese made goods or Chinese grown produce?
- g. What kinds of gaps exist in your society and what does your government do about them?
- h. What are the financial prospects for your country in the coming years?
- i. What contributions to society do rural folk make in your country?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

BIG PLANS: Write down your plans regarding the things in the left hand column. Write in the next column the things you must do from now to make these plans happen. In the right hand column, write down the obstacles to your plans happening.

	Big plans	Things to do	Obstacles
English studies			
Fitness			
Job			
Hobby			
Computer / Technology			
Money			
Other _____			

Talk about what you wrote to your partner(s). Discuss how you might all overcome the obstacles and what your chances are of making your plans happen.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find information about China's Premier Wen Jiabao. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. COUNTRY ADVANTAGE: Make a poster about the advantages of living in the countryside. Show your poster to your classmates in the next lesson. Which poster most made you want to live in the countryside and why?

4. CHINA AS #1: Write an essay describing your feelings about China becoming the number one economy in the world. How do you think this will change the world? Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone have similar thoughts?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. F d. F e. T f. F g. T h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| a. helping | aiding |
| b. huge | massive |
| c. folk | people |
| d. rural | countryside |
| e. narrow | reduce |
| f. agenda | list |
| g. shifting | changing |
| h. income | earnings |
| i. epoch-making | historical |
| j. annum | year |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| a. start helping the poor Chinese | who live in the countryside |
| b. a huge difference | in income |
| c. promises | of massive spending |
| d. put money in their pockets by | ending agricultural taxes |
| e. help narrow the income gap | that threatens social stability |
| f. high | on his agenda |
| g. shifting | the government's priority |
| h. Once the rural poor start spending, | the economy should take off |
| i. their income is just one third | of those in cities |
| j. an economic growth rate of more | than nine percent per annum |

GAP FILL:

China increases spending on rural poor

China's government has **decided** to start helping the poor Chinese who live in the countryside. There is a **huge** difference in income between people in cities, who are richer, and the millions of farmers, who are much poorer. Premier Wen Jiabao **opened** parliament yesterday with promises of **massive** spending to keep the country folk happy. He plans to put money in their **pockets** by ending agricultural taxes. He also increased spending on education in **rural** areas. He said this would help **narrow** the income gap that threatens social **stability**. He also said China's farmers could help China become the world's largest economy.

Wen Jiabao put helping China's poor **high** on his agenda, saying: "We need to...work to [**redirect**] investments by shifting the government's **priority** in...investment to the countryside." Once the rural poor **start** spending, the economy should take off. Sixty percent of China's **population** lives in the countryside. However, their income is just one third of those in cities. The Premier **stressed** the importance of his plans, stating: "This is a change of epoch-making significance." Mr. Wen will be **helped** by an economic growth rate of more than nine percent per **annum**.