

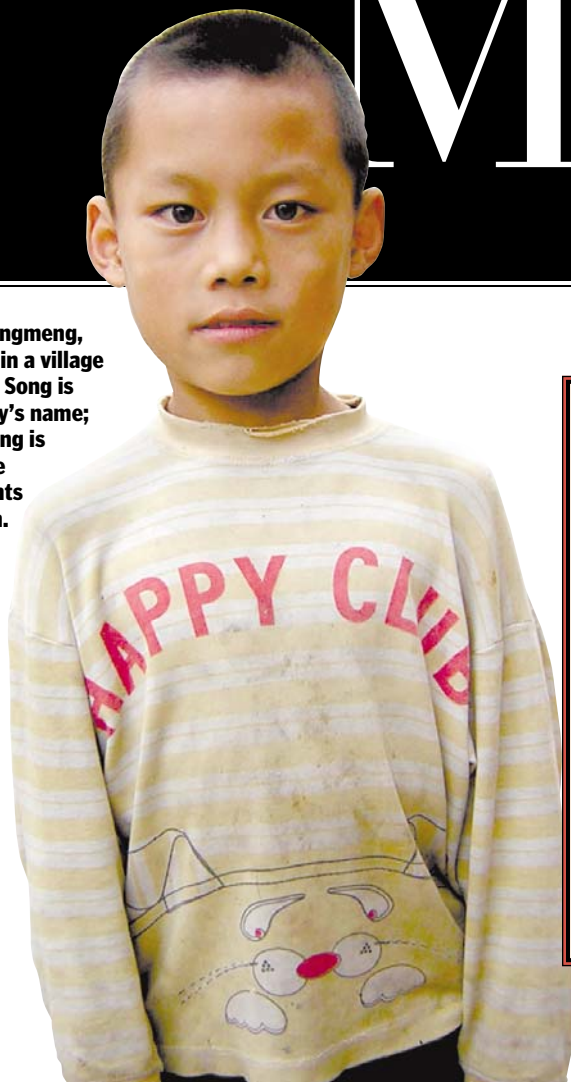


China's recorded history goes back more than 4,000 years.

# Kidspost

## My name is ... Mengmeng

Song Mengmeng, 11, lives in a village in China. Song is his family's name; Mengmeng is the name his parents gave him.



CHINA  
6,500 miles  
FROM WASHINGTON

This is the first in a series of KidsPost Journeys around the world to show readers how children in other countries live and play. Today we JOURNEY TO CHINA. Next month, discover the world of pyramids, camels and sand in Egypt.

BEIDIAO YUTAI, China  
● **Song Mengmeng**, 11 years old, lives with his twin brother, Song Wenwen, and his mother and father in Beidiao Yutai, a village of farmers in the countryside of northeastern China.

The family would be considered poor in the United States. Mengmeng's father does not have a lot of money. Mengmeng does not have a lot of new clothes or fancy toys.

But he and his family have plenty to eat. They live in a spacious house made of stones and cement, with blue-painted wood around the windows. They have a dog and a cat to play with. Ducks swim around in a tiny pond outside their house.

"My brother and I are different, even though we are twins," Mengmeng said in Mandarin. "I have bigger eyes, but a smaller head. He has smaller eyes, but a bigger head. And our voices are different, too."

Mengmeng and his brother usually get

up early. On school days, their mother wakes them about 5:30 a.m. The twins wash their hands and face right after getting out of bed. But they brush their teeth only at night.

After getting dressed in jeans and sweatshirts, they like to have hot porridge for breakfast. Sometimes their mother also gives them steamed bread or some *jianbing*, which is a pancake made out of cornmeal. It is so thin it looks like a napkin.

Then Mengmeng and Wenwen set out for school, each carrying books in a bag on his back. They have to walk about 40 minutes to their school in a nearby town, Lian Cheng. Classes begin at 7:50 a.m. and last until 4:30 p.m.

Mengmeng and his brother usually eat lunch at their aunt's house, because she lives close to the school. She makes whatever the boys like. Mengmeng's favorite is pickled vegetables. This time of year, Mengmeng also

carries a few chestnuts in a pocket of his jeans so he can snack whenever he feels like it.

At school, Mengmeng studies Chinese, math, science, English and social studies. Sometimes he has art and physical education, too. But he doesn't like art because he cuts himself with the scissors. "I hate that," he said.

Mengmeng's favorite is a class the teacher calls "exploration." In one lesson, Mengmeng and his friends study "the secrets of the soil." They learn how the corn and wheat seeds that his father plants grow into food.

After school, Mengmeng has about an hour's homework every day, mostly Chinese and math. Then his mother cooks some dumplings or fried eggs for dinner. "Whenever my father tries to cook, he burns everything," Mengmeng said.

—Edward Cody

### Mengmeng's Family



Mengmeng, left, and his twin brother, Wenwen, with their parents in the courtyard of their farm in Beidiao Yutai.

At right: Mengmeng, Wenwen and a friend. They like to watch cartoons and play soccer.

PHOTOS BY EDWARD CODY—THE WASHINGTON POST

### Where Mengmeng Lives

About 300 people live in Mengmeng's village. They earn their living by **farming**. Cows, goats and chickens wander around the little dirt lanes between houses. Although China has some of the world's largest cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, **most of China's 1.3 billion people live in the countryside**, like Mengmeng, and make their living by growing food.

At this time of year, most houses in Beidiao Yutai have corn set out to dry on the porch or in the yard. When the corn dries, the farmers will grind it into flour and use it to make bread or other things. Many houses also have piles of cow manure in their front yards, waiting to be spread in the fields.

Beidiao Yutai is in Shandong province. The region, named after nearby Yimeng Mountain, is full of rocky hills. The children of China get a week off from school at the beginning of October to celebrate China's national day. That holiday, Oct. 1, commemorates the moment in 1949 when Mao Zedong started Communist China after winning a civil war.



### Inside China

**How many people:** 1.3 billion (the most populated country in the world). About 25 percent of China's population is younger than 15.

**How big is it:** About 3.7 million square miles, but only about 10 percent of that is good for growing crops.

**What's the capital:** Beijing.

**Languages:** Mandarin is the dialect (or type) of Chinese spoken by 70 percent of people. There are seven other major dialects.

**Type of government:** Communist.

**Religion:** The country is officially atheist (believing in no god), but Buddhism is the most widely practiced religion.

**Do kids have to go to school:** Yes, from ages 6 to 14.

**Do they watch TV:** There are 291 TV sets for every 1,000 Chinese people. In the United States, there are 531 TV sets for every 1,000 people.

### How He Has Fun

■ **Watch TV:** Mengmeng and his brother like to watch cartoons on television after dinner. Their favorite is "Tom and Jerry" or a Chinese story about the Monkey King, who sets out on a journey to find knowledge but has a lot of problems along the way. Bedtime is 8 p.m.

■ **Play soccer:** Mengmeng and the other children play on the only paved street in their village.

■ **Figure out how things work:** Mengmeng likes to play with electrical things. He likes to take apart electrical motors or figure out what makes light bulbs work.

### China's 'Thanksgiving'

Mengmeng's favorite time of the year is **Spring Festival**, which comes in February. That is the main time in China for families to get together and have a meal all at the same table. It resembles Thanksgiving in the United States.

Mengmeng and his brother also get several weeks off from school. But the biggest reason they like Spring Festival is that their aunts, uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers give them envelopes full of money. With all their relatives chipping in, Mengmeng said, the twins can get more than \$100 combined. They use the money for school clothes and tuition.

Money in China is based on the yuan renminbi. One yuan (pronounced WAN) is worth about 12 cents in the United States.



### TODAY'S NEWS

#### Can You Go Farther On a Penny Farthing?

■ **Move over, Lance Armstrong.** A 43-year-old father of three is cycling across Australia, all 2,700 miles of it, on a 119-year-old "penny farthing" bicycle.

Lloyd Scott hopes to raise more than \$3 million for leukemia research with his six-week stunt.

Scott, a cancer survivor like six-time Tour de France champ Armstrong, grabbed attention when he began his bone-rattling ride last week wearing a heavy tweed suit (which he admits he will likely shed once he hits the Australian desert).

Penny farthing bicycles were popular in the 1880s. The name comes from their wheels: The large front wheel was thought



Lloyd Scott is attempting to ride a 119-year-old penny farthing bicycle across Australia.

to be like a penny compared with the much smaller rear wheel, or farthing (an old British coin equal to one-fourth of a penny).

#### A Dog's Life—Saved

■ **Two Pennsylvania firefighters** who found a limp dog inside a

burning house saved its life with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. "I still have dog breath," said Jason Pooler, "but I'd do it again in a minute."

Pooler and another fireman found the young chocolate Lab on the second floor of a burning house Friday. They carried the dog outside and began CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), an emergency treatment that combines heart massage and mouth-to-mouth breathing.

After a quick checkup at the vet's office, the dog was reunited with its grateful owners.

### WEATHER



**TODAY:** Clouds; rain (and leaves).

**HIGH** 72 **LOW** 56

**TOMORROW:** Mostly cloudy. High 62. Low 52.

PHOTO BY YASMEEN NABHANI, 8, MICLEAN

**WEATHER TRIVIA**  
WHEN WAS THE FIRST WEATHER SATELLITE LAUNCHED?  
ANSWER: APRIL 1960 (TIROS I).

### SPEAK OUT

#### THIS WEEK'S TOPIC Harry Potter 6

Kidspost reported last week that author J.K. Rowling will kill off another character in "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince." We know it won't be Harry because Rowling has said he'll live, at least to make book 7.

We want to know who you think won't make it to the series finale. Go to [www.washingtonpost.com/kidspost](http://www.washingtonpost.com/kidspost) and vote:

- **What character will die in the sixth Harry Potter book?**
- A. Professor Dumbledore
- B. Professor Snape
- C. Ron Weasley
- D. Hermione Granger
- E. Somebody else



Who's next? Hermione? Ron? At least Harry is safe—for now.

What do you think will happen in the sixth Harry Potter book? Send your letters to Kidspost, The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071. Or e-mail us at [kidspost@washpost.com](mailto:kidspost@washpost.com) (with "Harry" in the subject line).

■ Last week we asked you the best thing about being president. More than 360 Kidspost readers voted. Here are the results:  
**Living in the White House**—20%  
**Having your own plane**—12.3%  
**Being the boss**—9.7%  
**Being on television**—5.5%  
**Changing the world**—52.5%