

EPT SAMPLE – READING

Read the following passages and shade your answers to the questions that follow in the corresponding spaces on the Answer Sheet.

Xiao Wang's eyes well up with tears as she tells her story in a Beijing coffee shop. In 1999 the young beautician left her home in northeast China for the bright lights of the Chinese capital. Three years and a string of low-paying jobs later, the 23-year-old Changchun native is unemployed and broke. Her **meager** savings were drained by a kidney ailment, daily expenses and an impetuous decision to invest 800 yuan in acting classes that led nowhere. Alone and lost, Wang does not know what she will do next. But one thing is certain: as bad as things get for her in the big city, she has no plans to return to the northeast. Things **there** would only be worse. "I have no plans to return to my old home," she says. "If I did, there would be nothing for me to do there."

The industrial cities of northeastern China are in crisis. Major state-owned enterprises here, a mix of steel mills, oil wells and manufacturing companies, have been forced to stand or fall under their own weight. And the burden of this economic crisis with its factory closings and massive layoffs has fallen on the shoulders of women. Unskilled, untrained and often in the lowest-paid jobs, these women have been hit hardest by the sudden shift to a market economy. "Everyone in Harbin has several female relatives who are out of work," complains Liu Chinshu, a resident of Heilongjinag's provincial capital who has been **laid off** twice in recent years. "At least one third of the women I know are unemployed." Chen Lanyan, northeast Asia adviser for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), says that spouses often work for the same company, and that the management believes it's easier to lay off the wife's employment, who can then tend to the family while her husband remains the breadwinner. There is also a more practical explanation, says an NGO field researcher: "Factories think a lot of unemployed men could pose a threat to society." So it's little wonder that every day more young women like Xiao Wang start out on their own in hopes of finding a new life in some other corner of China.

But not everyone leaves. The rising tide of female unemployment is on display in downtown Harbin in almost any afternoon. In a park along the Songjiang River dozens of unemployed women crowd under Nestle and Coke sun umbrellas peddling soft drinks and snacks. Scores of others hold up cheap trinkets of handcrafts, beckoning tourists to take a look. They are all over 40, which is the retirement age for women in northeast China. "I never even thought of looking for a job," says Xia who lost her factory job one year ago and now sells light sticks and rings in the park. "If you're over 40 and have no skills and diploma, no one wants to hire you. Many women will accept almost any work to earn some cash. "I've done everything," says Li, a former factory worker who has been laid off since 1992. "Men don't want to do these things because they feel embarrassed." But this is a good season for selling their wares. When the bitter winter arrives in Heilongjiang, which borders Russia, most of these women will be forced inside – and away from their customers.

Yet they may be the lucky ones. For young women of the industrial region, even greater misery can await. On the narrow, tree-lined Fushun Street, dozens of small, private employment agencies have sprung up in tiny shopfronts, where hundreds stand shoulder to shoulder reading the advertisements that

cover every inch of the walls. Most of the jobs for women are as cleaners, maids and restaurant workers, offering as little as 350 to 600 yuan a month (about \$40 to \$70). But it's hard to know for sure which signs represent actual jobs. **The private employment industry is unregulated, and many in it prey on women.** "A woman looking for a job sees an advertisement offering high pay and a decent job," says UNIFEM's Chen. "She connects with the job agency, pays her fee and subsequently finds herself abducted into forced labor."

For those unwilling to take that risk, there are other options. Nowadays thousands of northern girls – known for their height and beauty – can be found working as prostitutes from Beijing in the north to Guangdong in the south, and even in far western Tibet. "When a friend comes back wearing nice clothes and with expensive things, they are impressed because they have never seen so much," says Yang Yang, a former party worker. "Since they have no capabilities or diplomas, they have no other way." The number of women from the region working as call girls has grown so large that the northeast has developed a reputation – to the chagrin of native residents – for producing prostitutes. When a northerner in Beijing was recently asked where she was from, she replied, "Shenyang" hastening to add, "but don't think I'm one of those girls."

The Communist Party is worried about how its handling of the workers' plight will affect its own reputation with the people. Worker unrest ranks near the top of Beijing's list of concerns these days. And economists predict that unemployment is only likely to get worse now that China has joined the World Trade Organization and must face greater foreign competition. Those new jobs that come to China because of its WTO membership will require high-tech skills and experience, which is more bad news for the women of the northeast. It's understandable why so many **pine for the good old days of socialism.**

The late Chairman Mao Zedong once famously proclaimed that women "hold up half the sky." Maybe that was then. Because these days the women of China's industrial belt don't hold much – except trinkets for sale.

Paul Mooney – December 2002

1. “**meager**” (para 1) means
 - A. invaluable
 - B. insufficient
 - C. involuntary
 - D. indefinite

2. “**there**” (para 1) refers to
 - A. the big city
 - B. the Chinese capital
 - C. the northeast
 - D. Beijing

3. “**laid off**” (para 2) means
 - A. dismissed from work
 - B. absent from work
 - C. given warning
 - D. given leave

4. Factories in the northeast prefer to discontinue women workers from work because they fear _____.
 - A. men are more qualified than women
 - B. women will not tend to their families
 - C. men without jobs would cause problems for society
 - D. women will find it easier to get jobs in other parts of China

5. We can infer from the first paragraph that _____.
 - A. Wang has no plans to return to her hometown
 - B. Wang has suffered a kidney ailment not too long ago
 - C. women in the northeast have not been holding jobs with high salaries
 - D. jobs will be harder to find in the northeast than in the city

6. “**Yet they may be the lucky ones.**” (para 4). From this statement we can infer that _____.
 - A. life is more miserable for the men
 - B. life can be even tougher for women in the big cities
 - C. women in the big cities are luckier than those in the northeast
 - D. women in the northeast earn more money than those in the big cities

7. “**The private employment industry is unregulated, and many in it prey on women.**” (para 4). Here the writer is suggesting that women are _____.
- A. very hard-working
 - B. taken advantage of
 - C. paid decently for their jobs
 - D. often disappointed with their jobs
8. The writer implies that the residents of China “**pine for the good old days of socialism**” (para 6) because _____.
- A. there was more equality for women then
 - B. they want China to join the World Trade
 - C. women were more skilled in those days
 - D. economists predict that unemployment rates will decline
9. Which of the following is the main idea of the passage?
- A. The economic plight of women in the northeast of China
 - B. The economic decline of women in the employment market
 - C. Better treatment of women employees during the days of socialism
 - D. The willingness of women to work at any job for a living
10. All of the following statements show evidence that many women in China are unemployed **EXCEPT**
- A. There are many women selling soft drinks and trinkets at parks.
 - B. Many women have become victims of employment agencies.
 - C. Many women are trained for new jobs.
 - D. Many women have become prostitutes.