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Virtual Economies, Virtual Goods  
and Service Delivery in Virtual Worlds

Volume 2, Number 4



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## Virtual Economies, Virtual Goods and Service Delivery in Virtual Worlds

### February 2010

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## **China's New Gold Farm**

By Anthony Gilmore, Nameless Films, LLC

**Keywords:** virtual world; China; WOW; farm.

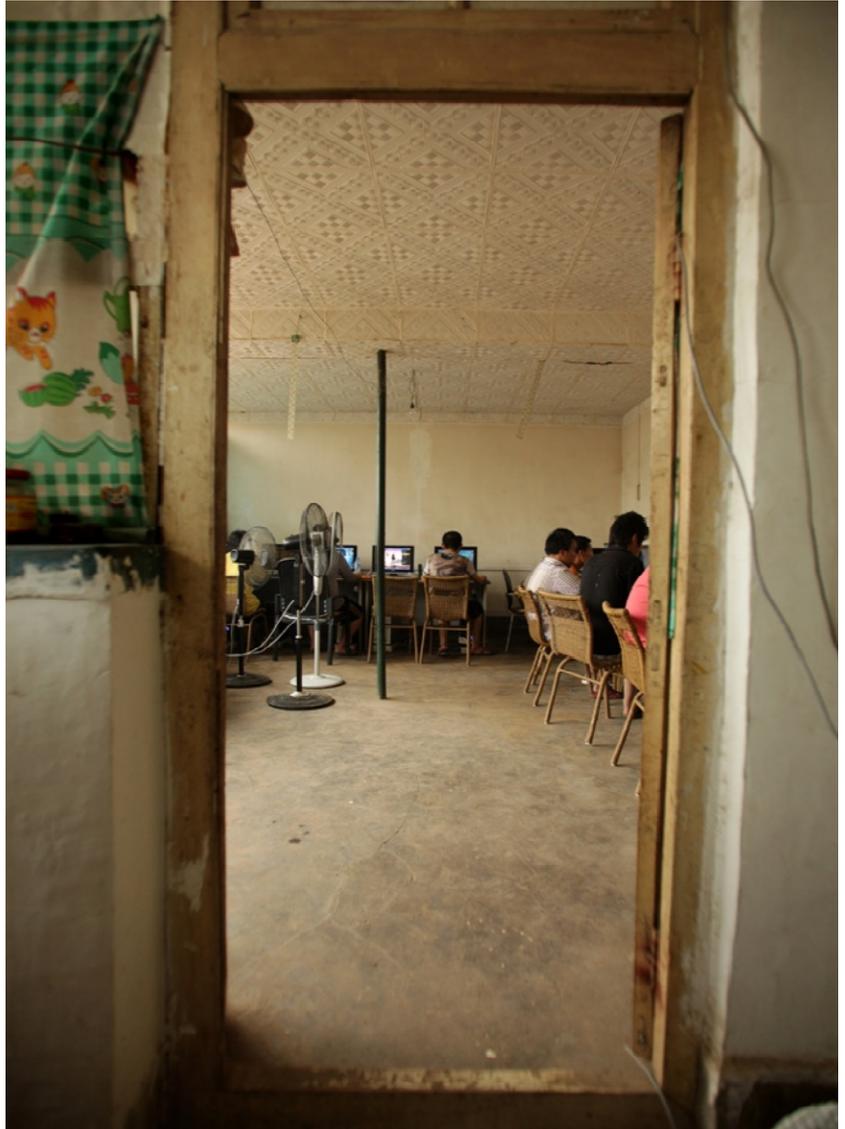
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## Working

Online game players paying real money for virtual services within the virtual worlds they inhabit fuel an industry that deals in commodities that really don't exist. This is the world of the Real Money Industry. In RMT, studios like this farm in Beijing help players progress their characters by providing them with a multitude of services: leveling characters while the players are not logged in online, offering in-game currency for sale, gaining points to improve the characters, and even items and equipment. Studios can range from a small family operation like this one to large scale companies employing hundreds of workers. There are many online games to service, but predominantly The World of Warcraft reigns as the primary market source for the RMT industry.





**The Office**

Summertime is hot and balmy out in the countryside. Without the luxury of AC, an army of fans runs to cool off the sweating workers as well as the warm PCs on which they do their work.



**Not So Regular Hours**

Work shifts are typically 12 hours long in smaller studios. Here, workers can earn overtime pay by working longer hours. However, at this farm, three-meal breaks help reduce that “long day” feeling.



**Gateway To The West**

The router is a unique find in a small farming village like this and is likely the only one in the whole village. Staying connected is a vital part of an RMT company and as such, this farm opts for the router over plumbing.



## The Process

A player looking to purchase some gold for The World of Warcraft could easily google “wow gold” and find a slew of listings for gold selling sites-most of these being Brokerages. Having located a Web site to go through, the player would then enter target information so that the delivery will be to the correct avatar (player’s character). The average price of gold varies depending on supply available and demand. The customer selects how much gold they wish to order at an average of USD 15 for 1,000 Gold and usually has a choice of in-game delivery options. When the order is placed, the Customer Service Representative at the Brokerage will contact a network of Gold Farms from which to purchase supplies of gold for the Brokerage.

Upon filling the order, the Customer Service Rep. will then contact the customer and deliver the gold through the method chosen by the customer. Sometimes the Service Rep. delivers the gold directly to the customer, but most of the time the Gold Farmer will do the actual delivery.

The Payout: Out of a USD 15 order of gold, the Brokerage acquires the largest percentage of the order payment due to large overhead expenditures with massive expenses for advertisement and the payroll of hundreds of workers, especially that of English-proficient employees. Depending on the individual company’s network make-up, their percentage can be as high as 75% of the order cost.

The Gold Farm typically would then intake 25% of the order cost. Gold Farms have a much riskier role on RMT because of the threat of account banning, but generally have lower overhead costs due to maintaining fewer staff than their much larger Brokerage counterparts.

The Customer’s Side: Just like in any other service industry, providing the customer with quality service and product is the primary mantra of many of the businesses in the RMT industry. Customers often pay through PayPal or credit cards as if they were ordering a product from an online shopping site. Most RMT businesses provide measures to safely make and receive orders because gaining the confidence and trust of the customer is as important as the service they offer. Once the customer receives the gold through a delivery option within the game, they do as they wish with the gold they now have. For most players that don’t have the time to produce sufficient amounts of gold in-game, these services are very useful and help them to keep up with their friends and family with which they enjoy the game-playing experience.



## THE BOSS

AS A 3RD GENERATION FARMER, MA LIANG IS USED TO HARD WORK AND STRONG VALUES, BUT HE DOESN'T TEND THE FIELDS. INSTEAD, HE TENDS THE INTERNET. ALWAYS SCANNING THE RMT MARKET, HE WATCHES OVER AND MANAGES HIS FARM WITH FAIR DISCIPLINE MAINTAINING A RELAXED AND FUN ATMOSPHERE FOR HIS WORKERS.



## The Chinese Gold Farmer

Many gamers think the gold farmer is an evil robotic persona out to ruin their game. This is a misconception fueled by misunderstanding. The real gold farmer is just another person that enjoys playing games as much as the players for which they provide virtual services. Much of their off-time is spent playing Starcraft, Warcraft III, and even their own World of Warcraft accounts.

The only real difference is that they get paid when on the clock. Making an average of USD 300 per month, doesn't sound like a lot but in rural China, it is a very comfortable amount. With working experience and salary raises, one farmer has saved up enough money to get married and start a family thanks to all the customers he has done work for. On the other hand, another farmer maintains a busy life of many girlfriends because of the money he can make through RMT. Generally, though, most of the workers send money back home to their parents to help the family out to improve their quality of life. This is all made possible by the demand that is produced by the game players of these online

## THE DAY SHIFTER



## THE NOOB



## THE DAY SHIFTER



## THE TOP LEVELER



**The Cook**

On the farm, Ma Liang’s mother gathers crops and prepares all the meals for their family and the workers. She feels that she is taking care of a large family with the workers acting as sons. In China, families are allowed only one child, but for her, she is one of the few to enjoy the feeling of having many.

**Gamer Fuel In China**

Traditional home cooked meals fuel the workers at this farm. Ranging from a variety of vegetable dishes to rice and buns, the workers enjoy three square meals a day—a luxury compared to many gold farms where the workers must provide meals for themselves.

**A Ladies’ Touch**

Having met Ma Liang online through some games, she is quite comfortable around an environment of gamers, and is very proud of Ma Liang’s work. Ma Liang’s girlfriend lives at the farm with him and his family and helps manage the farm by keeping him happy and relaxed—an uncommon dynamic found at this unique farm. When the year is right, they plan to get married and continue their lives.