

A Study on Food Problems in China

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1. BACKGROUND

The food supply problem of China, which has the world's largest population, is the issue of focus for many around the globe. Various researchers have conducted research on this topic. However, a consensus is far from having been achieved. For example, pessimists such as L.R. Brown fears that China's increasing population and high rate of economic growth will make impossible China's food self-sufficiency, and China will eventually buy up the entire food supply in the world. On the other hand, G.K. Heilig from IIASA assures that China can solve its food problem by itself if it utilizes its vast land, acquires advanced agricultural technology, and pursues appropriate policies. In fact, China has taken a rather volatile path after the Second World War. China has endured serious famine crises, become a food exporter later on, ran over-production in the 1990s, and in turn reduced production in 2000s. Observing this trend, it is quite difficult to ascertain which of the above theories, pessimists' or optimists', will eventually prove right. In this paper, I will examine the current state of China's supply-demand of food, and speculate on the possibility of China's food self-sufficiency.

2. WORLD POPULATION/FOOD SUPPLY PROBLEMS

Population problems have a direct influence on food supply problems. World population is expected to reach 9 billion in 2050. As the world economy develops, changes in consumption patterns will increase meat consumptions. However, with the current technology and food production, we can hardly sustain the entire global population with the new consumption patterns. Therefore, we have to take urgent measures to avoid the looming global famine crises.

3. CHINA'S POPULATION/FOOD SUPPLY PROBLEMS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

While China is experiencing a high rate of growth, its high standard of education and one-child policy are contributing to the demographic transition. China's population is expected to decline beginning 2020, and China's situation of aging society is as severe as any advanced countries. China's high education level among females decrease the birth rates, and the high education rates also decrease the female agricultural labor force, affecting the production. In addition, China's agricultural production is exposed to further risks stemming from such problems pertaining to development as poor maintenance of dams and lack of disaster prevention systems.

4. WATER SHORTAGES

China's water shortage is severest in Huabei region. In some parts of the region, desertification claims 36,000 hectare of arable land each year. Water shortage is a serious threat to food production and needs to be addressed urgently. Especially, sustainability of water resources development is crucial to China's food security. Among such water projects is the vast project of drawing water from Southern China to irrigate Northern China.

5. FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CHINA'S FOOD SUPPLY PROBLEMS (CONCLUSION)

G.K. Heilig proposes concrete solutions to the problems, and concludes that the prospects are actually positive. Indeed, China's food production was the largest at 512.3 million tons in 1998 despite the natural disasters. And, back from the reduction in 2003, Chinese production in 2004 amounts to 450 million tons. These figures suggest China's resilience. Thus, it seems we don't need to be too pessimistic.

Yet, as China's rapidly growing economy causes increasingly severe degradation to the natural environment, we should keep in mind Brown's warning and take various measures in order to guarantee China's food self-sufficiency.