

# **P** Food, Population and Employment in China

**China in  
Peaceful  
Development**

**Food Is Not a Problem**

**When Aid-receiving Became History**

**Population Is Not a Burden**

**Quality: More Important than the**

**Size of the Population**

**Active Employment Policy**

**Financial and Social Guarantee for**

**Creating More Jobs**



Foreign Languages Press

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# Food, Population and Employment in China

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Zhang Guoqing



Foreign Languages Press

## 图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

粮食、人口与就业 / 张国庆著; 丛国玲译. — 北京: 外文出版社, 2006  
(中国的和平发展系列)  
ISBN 7-119-04468-0

I. 粮... II. ①张...②丛... III. ①粮食 - 问题 - 研究 - 中国 - 英文 ②人口 - 研究 - 中国 - 英文 ③  
就业问题 - 研究 - 中国 - 英文 IV. ① F326.11 ② C924.24 ③ D669.2

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2006) 第 050045 号

作 者 张国庆  
责任编辑 崔黎丽  
助理编辑 薛 平  
英文翻译 丛国玲 布 布  
英文审定 Paul White 黄友义  
内文及封面设计 天下智慧文化传播公司  
执行设计 姚 波  
制 作 外文出版社照排中心  
印刷监制 冯 浩

## 粮食、人口与就业

张国庆 著

\*

© 外文出版社

外文出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄大街 24 号)

邮政编码 100037

北京外文印刷厂印刷

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号)

北京邮政信箱第 399 号 邮政编码 100044

2006 年(大 32 开)第 1 版

2006 年 12 月第 1 版 第 1 次印刷

(英)

ISBN 7-119-04468-0

17-E-3722P

First Edition 2006

ISBN 7-119-04468-0

© Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, China, 2006

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

Website: <http://www.flp.com.cn>

Email Address: [Info@flp.com.cn](mailto:Info@flp.com.cn)

[Sales@flp.com.cn](mailto:Sales@flp.com.cn)

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P. O. Box 399, Beijing, China

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

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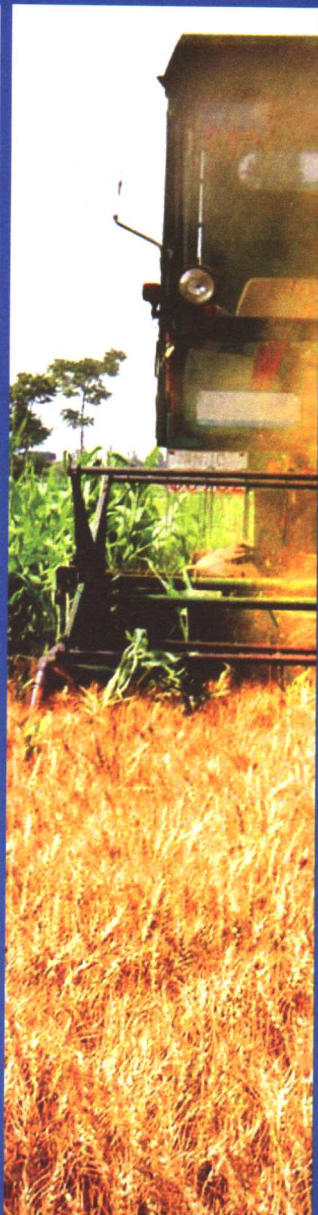
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I.

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**Food Is Not a Problem**

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The New Year's Day of 2006 was not an ordinary one for the Chinese people. On that day, the United Nations stopped food aid to China, ending the history of China's being a food recipient country for 26 years. Also on that day China officially abolished the "Regulations on Agricultural Taxes."<sup>1</sup> This put an end to over 2,000 years of taxing Chinese farmers.<sup>2</sup>

The last batch of wheat delivered to China by the World Food Program was unloaded in Shenzhen on April 8, 2005.

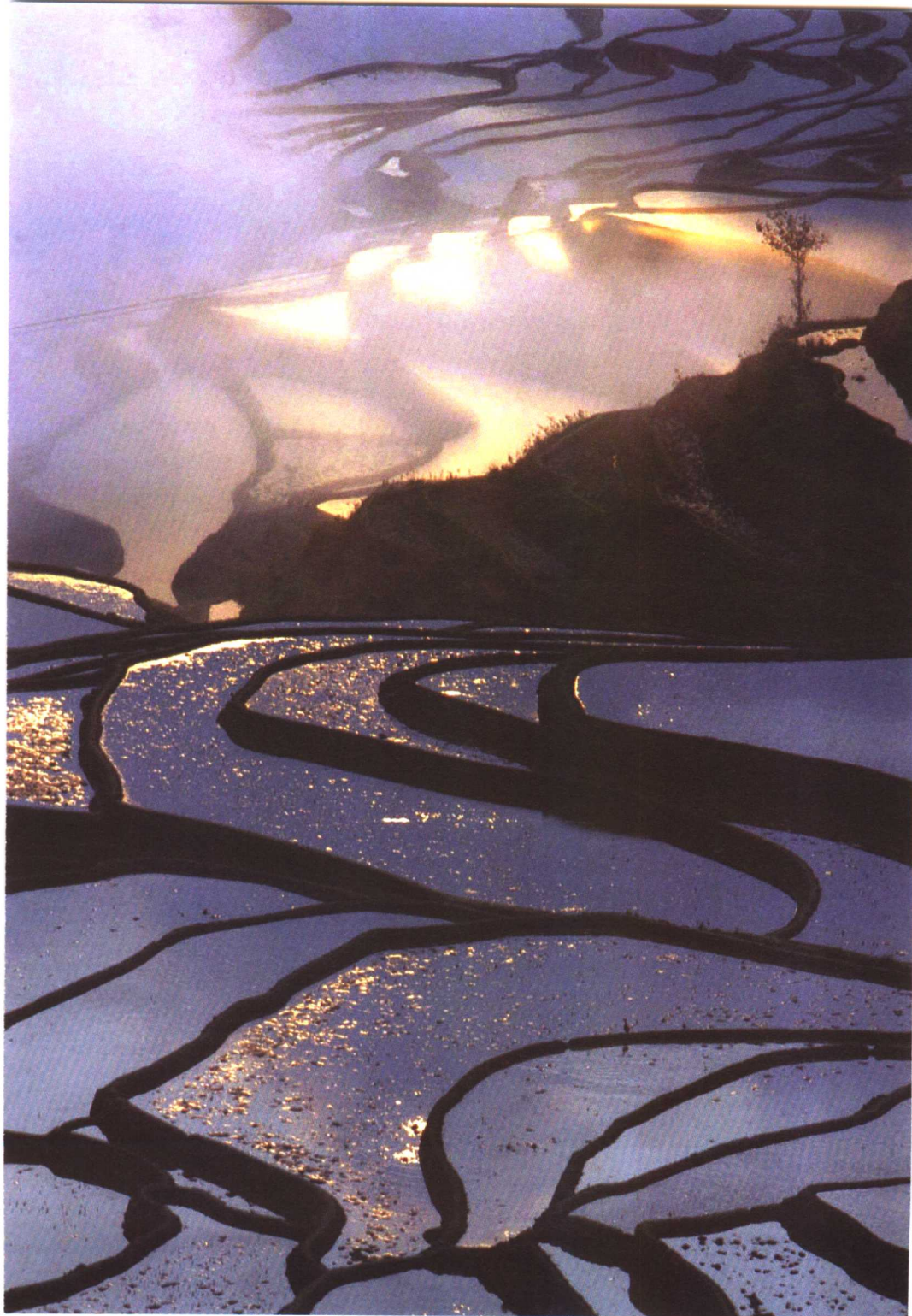


# 1.

## When aid-receiving became history

On April 7th, 2005, a shipment of 43,450 tons of wheat worth US\$7.2 million, donated to China by the United Nations World Food Program (WFP),<sup>3</sup> arrived in Shenzhen for a poverty-relief project in the inland provinces of Gansu and Shanxi and the autonomous regions of Guangxi and Ningxia.

- 1 On June 3rd, 1958, the 96th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the First National People's Congress promulgated the "Regulations on Agricultural Taxes" which were implemented until January 1, 2006. The agricultural taxes in the previous decades had been important sources of government revenue. Statistics show that in the 52 years from 1949 to 2000, farmers had handed in over 700 billion kilograms of food to the state. From 2004, the State Council eased the tax burden on farmers, and finally exempted them from agricultural taxes altogether. Statistics also show that, thanks to the abolition of agricultural taxes and tobacco fees, farmers will pay 51 billion yuan less to the state. Up to 2005, 800 million farmers had directly benefited from the policies. On December 29th, 2005, the 19th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 10th National People's Congress passed a resolution with a big majority of votes to abolish the "Regulations on Agricultural Taxes" effective as of January 1, 2006.
- 2 The agricultural tax is a type of local tax levied on agricultural incomes based upon annual output from the land. It is usually called "the public grain."
- 3 The WFP is the largest global humanitarian aid institution. It has worked in China for 26 years. The organization has provided food aid equivalent to US\$1 billion to about 30 million people in the remote areas of central and western China. The WFP has made great contributions to promoting China's poverty-relief programs by providing auxiliary training programs, helping construct roads, irrigation and drinking water facilities, etc.



This was the final batch of food aid from the WFP to China.

This was not a sudden “full stop.” As early as in 2001, the WFP had reached a consensus with the Chinese government through consultations that food aid to China would come to an end, indicating that the Chinese government had the ability to rely on its own efforts to get rid of poverty.

In fact, as Mr. Douglas Broderick, the UN’s WFP representative in China, pointed out, in recent years the Chinese government has adopted many policies and measures to promote poverty-relief programs, particularly to resolve the poverty problems in western China. Facts also show that these

■ Terraced fields

■ A good harvest of summer grain



measures are very effective, and have enabled several million poverty-stricken people to shake off poverty. Poor families that used to need aid have been gradually leaving poverty behind.

The WFP has grounds to feel pleased with the achievements that the Chinese government has made in its poverty-relief programs:

China provides food to 21 percent of the world's population, despite having only seven percent of the world's arable land;

In less than three decades since China adopted the policy of opening to the outside world, the poverty-stricken population in the country has been reduced from 250 million to 26.1 million at present, making up 70 percent of the world's population that has got rid of poverty during the same period; The last five years have witnessed an increase of 300 million poverty stricken people in the world. In the first four years of China's 10th Five-Year Plan period (2001-2005), the absolutely poverty-stricken population in China was reduced by six million.

During the last 25 years, more than 20 percent of the growth of the major agricultural products in the world has come from China. The annual grain output in China has increased from 300 million to 500 million tons. The total supply of major agricultural products is balanced, and in good years there is even surplus.

China has made enormous achievements in grain pro-

duction and in its poverty-relief programs. China has not only answered with facts questions raised by Lester Brown, an American agricultural and environment expert, who eleven years ago wrote “Who Will Feed China?”<sup>1</sup> China has also been praised by officials from the UN’s WFP: “China’s contribution to the global millennium development goals cannot be overstated.”

However, a full stop can sometimes be a turning point. Since China bade farewell to its history as a grain recipient, the country has been gradually becoming a major donor. With the rapid development of its national economy, China has also increased its support for the WFP. After the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, the Chinese government provided through the WFP food aid equivalent to US\$1 million to the

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1 Lester Brown, Director of the World Watch Institute, USA, issued a 141-page report under the title “Who Will Feed China? — Wake-up Call for a Small Planet” in September 1994. Mr. Brown held the view that China was becoming ever-increasingly short of water resources, the country’s rapid industrialization was encroaching upon and damaging a great amount of farmland, and every year China had an additional population the size of that of Beijing. By the beginning of the 21st century, China might have to import a great quantity of grain from overseas in order to feed its population of more than one billion, he warned. This might lead to a rise in worldwide grain prices. Therefore, due to economic globalization, China’s food problem might have an enormous impact on the world food supply. Brown’s report quickly won the support of Western public opinion. His inaccurate judgment was soon taken by a number of people in the West as firm evidence to support the “China threat” theory: “China’s food problem will harm the food security of the people of the whole world”... “the food shortage in China will be more terrible than a military invasion.”... In a word, “China is the biggest threat to the world.”

victims in the disaster area. By April 2005, China had donated US\$5 million to the WFP, and in 2005 China increased its donation to the WFP by over 40 percent.

It is worthy of note that the WFP has kept its representative office in China since ending its aid to the country. The institution will now make more purchases in China. “This is unprecedented in the history of the WFP.”<sup>2</sup> This also proves that the WFP has confidence in China’s ability to supply grains.

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## 2.

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### Putting an end to a practice 2,600 years old

This was a specially exciting New Year’s Day for millions of Chinese farmers. On the issue of feeding the people, Chinese farmers are a group that has made gigantic contributions. It is no exaggeration to say that “farmers have fed China.” Today, they have deleted, with their hard work, the question of “Who will feed China?” They have also brought about hope for farmers in the developing countries.

It is gratifying to note that it was also on the same day that 2,600 years of Chinese farmers paying taxes ended. It is worthwhile noting that the abolition of the agricultural tax

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<sup>2</sup> “WFP to Purchase More Donation Materials from China,” Xinhua News Agency, Beijing, December 15, 20005.



Farmers buying tractors

was achieved three years ahead of schedule, as originally five years had been set for achieving this goal.

This was an important step bringing agricultural development in China into line with international practice. When the national economy of a country is developed to a certain extent, zero agricultural tax is the absolute rule; indeed, a certain amount of financial subsidies to farmers then becomes normal. With the background of economic globalization, China has removed the agricultural tax and adopted the policies of “levying less, granting more and being flexible,” that are in line with the requirements of the era and adapted to the development of economic globalization.

According to calculations made by experts, for the benefit of strengthening the competitiveness of China’s

agriculture, the cancellation of the agricultural tax signifies that the production cost for agricultural products per *mu* (One *mu* equals one 15th of a hectare) is reduced by 38 yuan based on the calculation of 1.3 billion *mu* of farmland. The production cost per *mu* of grain production has been reduced by 10-20 percent. Therefore the cancellation will play a major role in upgrading the competitiveness of agriculture.

The farmers have been, meanwhile, relieved from other burdens to a certain degree. After the reduction and exemption of the agricultural tax, the taxes and expenses per capita paid by farmers nationwide were reduced by 44.3 percent in 2004, and this figure further increased to 93 percent in 2005. From 2006 onward, about 50 billion yuan of agricultural tax and expenses will be reduced annually. This is particularly important for farmers in the traditional agricultural areas.

The legal abolition of the "Regulations on Agricultural Tax" has also laid a foundation for promoting "comprehensive reforms in rural areas" and "building up new rural areas" on a large scale in 2006.

### 3.

From a food importing country to an exporting country

As one index for food security, China continued to, based



Harvest of five-color peppers