

predicted that future per-unit harvests of corn, wheat and paddy rice, three major staple grains, are expected to be three times as large as current levels. Therefore, the per-unit capacity of grain products will be sufficient to meet China's domestic need for at least the next 50 years, without the necessity to expand farmland.<sup>67</sup>

But even if this is true, one cannot confidently say that at some point in the future a net loss of cultivated area will not translate into decreased production. This is, in essence, the never-ending neo-Malthusian "catastrophist" versus the "cornucopialist" debate. How much faith can China put into future technological innovation?<sup>68</sup> Because of the trend to net land loss, and the large absolute increase in population in China, how technology and policy reform influence productivity (aside from the question of how policy directly affects the level of land loss) is extremely important.<sup>69</sup>

If China experiences net cultivated land losses and declines in agricultural production must we conclude that large numbers of Chinese people will starve? The answer to this is no. Food security and food self-sufficiency are not synonymous. Declines in food self-sufficiency may be met by imports from foreign producers. The international trading system, a rules-based system, may enhance food security. Consequently, there is a need to be sceptical of the assertion that land loss and population growth will soon translate into large numbers of Chinese starving to death, or resorting to violence to improve their daily calorie intake.

Forests have are also subject to degradation and deterioration. Only remnants of Chinese old growth forests remain. The total forested area of China may be in the

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<sup>67</sup>Jiang Wandt, "Research Unveils China's Agricultural Potential", Beijing Review, June 19-25, 1995. p.7.

<sup>68</sup>There is an important question here, and just not for China. Are prevailing agronomic practices sustainable in the long term? If not, and no viable alternative methods are available that have comparable yields, and no new lands are suitable for cultivation, agricultural production would decline.

<sup>69</sup>For example, production could be enhanced if the number of parcels of land cultivated by each farmer were reduced. Land reform granted land based on its quality; in order to give each farmer an egalitarian share, each farmer was given an average of 9 plots of various grades of land to manage. While there has been some reorganization and the average number of plots held by a farmer has been reduced, there is still room for rationalization of land distribution. Source Takashi Sugimoto, "Mass Migration Pressures in China", North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue: Research Programme Working Paper Number 5, February 1992, p.21. There is also scope for storage and transportation improvements to reduce wastage.