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The Actual Role of China's Small-scale Agricultural Production System and the Choice of Rural Reform

Today, mainly the actual role of China's small-scale agricultural production system will be discussed, not involving its historical impact on the long-term development process of China's economy.

First, I would like to emphasise the basic national condition of China. In 2008, the total population was 1.325 billion and the total rural population was 721 million, which is 54.29% of the total population. Although China's population density is not the highest in the world, both population sizes determine the effects and consequences of such scale, consequently having a close relationship with our nation's food issue, environmental issue, resource issue, energy issue, as well as the economic and social reform and its progress.

Under the conditions of such total population size and rural population size, how the small-scale agricultural production system is to be evaluated is concerned with the direction of the rural reform and its progress. It also then concerns the success or failure of China's economic and social reform. If we do not see the historical contributions and practical role of the small-scale agricultural production system over the past 30 years in the progress of China's economic and social status, it will be treating such small-scale agricultural production systems as something backward that should be abandoned.

Looking at the past 30 years till today, apart from the reclamation system and construction corps which have been retained, the small-scale agricultural production system is still the leading role in China. Its role should not be ignored. First, it has protected China's food security and right to food. Since the reform and opening up, China has resolved the food issue of 22% of the world's population using 7% of the world's arable land. This is an accomplishment that is recognised by all. By 2007, China's food production has reached 500 million tonnes, that is approximate 1/4 of the world's food production. When everyone is analysing the reasons for China's stable and increasing food production, the role of factors such as the nations' agricultural policy, science and technology and agricultural investment are discussed, but what is often neglected or unmentioned is the platform for these factors, characterised by the household contract - the role of the small-scale agricultural food production system. We cannot deny that China's food production miracle was a result of this platform. At the same time, it is the self-sufficient characteristic of the small-scale agricultural production system which guarantees the autonomy and independence of large rural population food supply, thus playing an active role in the stabilising of the food market. Second, China's small-scale agricultural production system has played an active role in areas such as the conservation of agricultural biodiversity and germplasm resources, ecological environment, as well as soil properties. Indeed, the environment of resources in our rural areas are worsening. However, the condition is much better than

that of large-scale agricultural production systems. Under the conditions of a small-scale production, the traditional agricultural method is still being used and the use of homemade fertiliser is commonplace. In terms of land production, China's small-scale agricultural production system achieves similarly high standards even though rice yield in many areas in the western regions fall between 600 and 800kg. Inter cropping and multiple cropping indices are also very high; Third, the labour productivity of China's small-scale agricultural production system are indeed low, but under the conditions of China's population size and the condition that China's society cannot provide sufficient jobs, it has solved many rural employment issues, playing the role of stabilising China's society and buying time for China's economic and social reform and development. The contributions and uses of China's small-scale agricultural production system are not limited to these. Several foreign scholars say that there are many areas of China's small-scale agricultural production system which are worth concluding, worth learning from and worth promoting. They also warn us not to simply imitate the foreign "modern agriculture" model, but to walk our own path based on China's national conditions. I feel that we should ponder about this, and at the least not simply regard such small-scale agricultural production systems as backward and to abandon it.

However, the pushing force of agriculture going corporate is large. It seems that having agriculture go corporate is a direction, and experts have also given many reasons to support that. Nevertheless, we cannot forget China's total population size and rural population size, which are a big challenge regardless of the system. I would like to innovate a rural management model based on the government's principle of the new countryside, to establish a good rural social insurance system, to strengthen the rural community and human environment, to protect the rural resource environment, improve rural infrastructure, raise production and living standards of farmers, narrow the urban-rural development gap, as well as to maintain the characteristics of rural areas. This could be a good choice for building a harmonious social and ecological civilisation in a certain period of time.