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# Achieving Food Security in China

## The Challenges Ahead

Zhang-Yue Zhou

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# Achieving Food Security in China

China's food security has never failed to attract the public's attention. Feeding China's large population has always been a huge challenge. The latest large-scale famine took place in 1958–62 during which approximately 37 million people died of starvation. However, since the early 1980s, China's food availability has improved drastically. The important question is then: has China achieved its food security? Although China's food availability has significantly improved, it has not achieved a high level of food security due to the lack of progress in several other important dimensions of food security.

The book examines China's food security practices in the past six decades, explores the root causes that led to food shortages or abundances, and elaborates on the challenges that China has to deal with in order to improve its future food security. China's quest for food security serves as a valuable lesson for many other countries to learn through China's experiences and to better manage their food security in the future. The book also draws attention to the fact that China's food security status has a huge impact on the global community and hence global collaboration is a mutually beneficial approach.

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Zhang-Yue Zhou

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In fond memory of my mum: Yu-Lin Huang



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# Preface

It has been my intention to write a book about China's food security for some years. On 27 August 2013, I received an email from Ms Yongling Lam, the Commissioning Editor with Routledge, asking me whether I was interested in publishing my research work with Routledge. I replied to Ms Lam that I was happy to publish with Routledge. *Achieving Food Security in China: The Challenges Ahead* is the result.

Having personally suffered from food shortages, especially during the two most food-scarce periods, the 1958–1962 Great Famine and the 1966–1976 Cultural Revolution, I have always hoped that the people of China will never again have to experience miseries brought about by food scarcity. Since the early 1980s, food availability in China has improved and today supply is abundant. Questions arise: why did not the Chinese people have an adequate amount of food to eat before the 1980s when China had less people but relatively more natural resources? Why do the Chinese people have more food to eat today when there are more people but less resources? Seeking answers to such questions is beneficial not only for China but may also help other countries improve their future food security.

Food availability is only one dimension of food security. While China has improved its food availability, challenges in other aspects of food security exist or are emerging. Major challenges include the widespread and persistent existence of unsafe and low-quality foods; large and expanding income inequalities; and continuing environmental pollution and natural resource degradation. Only by overcoming these challenges can China expect to achieve a higher level of food security. What China should do to overcome such challenges is elaborated on in this book.

I have written this book for anyone who is interested in China's food security. Readers from other food-insecure countries may find China's experiences and lessons of great value to help their own countries to improve food security. This book may also be of interest to those concerned about general global security: China's success in overcoming its food security challenges will be good news for everyone on the Earth; its failure in addressing those challenges could have very undesirable consequences for the planet.

Having completed the writing of this book is a huge relief: not only because I could stop going through a large amount of literature, but mainly because I can have a break away from the deep emotional turmoil of dealing with these issues. I do become quite emotional when going through the literature dealing with the food shortages suffered by many Chinese people in the past, especially during the Great Famine. I ask how those miseries could have happened. I get concerned while considering those food security challenges facing China today because China is still not proactively addressing and dealing with them. Instead, the collective choice of the people in the country has resulted in the challenges getting even more severe: continuing pollution of the environment, a lack of will to narrow income inequalities, and ongoing production and consumption of unsafe and low-quality foods. I hope this book will contribute to a search for solutions to handle China's ongoing food security challenges.

Writing this book has benefited from my earlier research as is reflected throughout the book. I have also benefited enormously from discussions with, and comments and suggestions from, many friends on many issues addressed in the book; in particular, my colleagues from the College of Business, Law and Governance at James Cook University. Adjunct Professor John Mullen of Charles Sturt University kindly read and edited my first manuscript. He gave me many critical but very valuable and constructive comments and suggestions to improve the book. My friends, Maria Mu, Ian Hu and John Cooper also read my earlier manuscript and gave me many valuable comments and suggestions.

I would like to thank the staff at Routledge for their professional and skilful support in bringing the book to publication. Working with Yongling Lam, Editor – Economics and Business and Samantha Phua, Senior Editorial Assistant, has always been a great pleasure. My sincere thanks are also extended to Kelly Cracknell, Production Editor, Kate Fornadel, Project Manager, Amy Freitag, Editorial Coordinator, and Carmel Huestis, Copyeditor, for their extremely professional services.

During the past three years, my dear wife, Jihong Li, has shown great patience by not easily getting bored on the numerous occasions when I tried to elaborate to her some ideas and thoughts I wished to include in the book.

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Townsville, Australia  
5 January 2017