

The Revolution in China's Agricultural Output

Please hand in a hard copy of your paper **in class** one day after an appointment with the Williams Communication Center. (E.g., if you have a Wednesday appointment, you have until Friday to hand in the paper.) In no case may you hand the paper in later than Friday, October 9, 2014.

Purpose

This paper asks you to pull together material from our readings and class discussions to date, with Li's **Village China** as your primary source, supplemented by the "Living" video and class discussion. For reference, here is the [Contracts Memo](#) from class.

Topic

The following topic is a (strong) suggestion, not a mandate. However, I've empirically tested this with over 2 dozen of your predecessors; it works.

Standard Interpretation

The standard view stresses the role of incentives: agriculture under Mao was an unmitigated disaster, subsequent reforms an unrivaled success, the story is socialism versus markets. In this black-and-white depiction, incentives under collectivization were poor, institutions unworkable, planning a failure, and production teams a disaster. Post-1982 reforms, above all the Household Responsibility System, undid that structure, and the rest is history.

Your Argument

Play "devil's advocate" and argue that (at least since the Great Leap Forward) agriculture slowly improved, and that improvements were accelerating at the time that collectivization was (forcibly) ended.

Do not go to the opposite extreme of arguing that incentives were irrelevant; instead, **argue that other factors were primary**. Remember, if incentives were "it", then we should have seen (i) strong growth before Mao came to power, (ii) no growth under collectives, that is, until a year or two after the implementation Household Responsibility System (HRS), (iii) then a big spurt, and (iv) then no growth – after all, the shift to the HRS was a one-time event!

But that is not what happened – right? (**Marshal data from the Li book!**) What else mattered? — non-labor inputs? prices? comparative advantage? technology? other elements that might affect total agricultural output.

Remember that this is a paper, so you need a clear theme. Toward that end, focus on **one** factor, with a paragraph in your introduction justifying why you chose that factor rather than others.

Format

The paper (as per the syllabus) is to be cleanly presented (double-spaced, 1" margins, 11-12pt font, a blank line to separate paragraphs, a properly formatted bibliography) and handed in as a hard copy.

Get someone else to edit your penultimate copy (including, but not limited to, proofreading). The [CommCenter](#) is another (indeed, near-ideal!) alternative. If you can get them to critique your argument, great! To that end, someone in the class is ideal as they will be better able to offer substantive comments on your argument and examples. Do acknowledge their contribution!

An economics paper is not an exercise in creative writing, nor should it employ the wooden, formulaic prose of a physics paper. Make sure that you (i) do **not** use passive voice and (ii) avoid both informality (contractions) and excessive formality (the royal “we” suggests it is not your own work, and hence is in violation of the Honor Code!).

While not typical writing problems in your cohort of W&L students, Make sure that (iii) paragraphs really are – anything beyond a half-page is suspect – that (iv) sentences are not run-ons (anything that continues beyond 3 lines almost surely is). Please (v) don’t rely on spell-check, which for example fails to distinguish “lead” from “led”.

Poor prose hurts your grade. Good prose correlates with good content: it’s hard to write crisp sentences and proper paragraphs when you’re not sure what you want to say. I posit that the obverse is also true: it’s hard to be sloppy in your argumentation if you employ crisp prose.

Evidence

The paper ought to be filled with concrete examples, evidenced by quotes, numbers and references to Huang et al and especially **Village China**. Use inline citations and end-of-paper bibliography, not footnotes and not endnotes. Add the (first) last name with the first citation, and thereafter only the page number, until you switch sources. For example:

...from Sancha to the hospital ... (Hessler 159) ... after his fever broke (175), ... new rice cultivars of the Green Revolution in Qin Village ... (Li 235) ... contracts (Huang 470).

If you draw on a class handout or lecture notes, insert that in the bibliography as well, with the handout title or lecture title and date or blog page. See my lists of readings on WordPress for one format for your bibliography; the links to “Citation Styles...” [somewhere] on the newly minted Leyburn home page contain others.

Structure and Length

Again, your paper should have a clear theme, a question that you will answer (or otherwise argue), outlined in an introduction. That typically requires one paragraph, sometimes two, but never three – in other words, about one page. Then make your case, which will likely require at least three but seldom much more than five pages once you insert quotes and other references to the book. At the end state your conclusion, again the better part of a page. It should not reiterate your introduction – that may (sometimes) be acceptable for a book, but *never* in a short paper. A good length will thus be about 6 pages, plus your name, proofreader acknowledgment, pledge and the bibliography and any tables or graphs you might append. (While tables are not necessary, economists do like to see numbers!)

Summation

It’s hard to write a short paper if your theme is vague or unduly broad. It’s hard to write a long paper if you have a crisp, clear topic that delimits the data needed to back your [single] claim.