The South-to-North and North-to-South Flows of Grains and Cereals—Changes to Directions and Quantities of Flows of Grains and Cereals between North and South in Contemporary China

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Over the more than forty years since 1949, there have been major historical changes to the directions and quantities of grains and cereals flows between China’s North and South. The most important of these changes was a fundamental shift from the dominance of southern grains and cereals support for the North to that of northern support for the South. Flows of grains and cereals between northern and southern China has had a major impact on both intra-regional and inter-regional socioeconomic development; that is why regional balance of grains and cereals supply and demand has become a major topic of discussion. On August 22, 1970, Mao Zedong 毛泽东 made this comment at a meeting of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee: “After 1949, we unified the country, but issues of south-to-north grains and cereals transfer and north-to-south coal transfer emerged. These issues existed before 1949, but we didn’t know about them. I don’t know if northern coal was shipped southward under Chiang Kai-shek’s reign. And grains and cereals, did he send southern grains and cereals northward? It would seem that we need to find a progressive solution to this question.” The historical trajectory through which the dominance

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of southern support for the north in terms of grains and cereals supply transitioned into the dominance of northern support for the south is an important topic for contemporary agricultural history research. This topic is of profound historical and practical importance.

By “northern China” we refer to an area that consists of the fifteen provinces, autonomous regions, and cities under the direct control of the central government, including Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Shandong, Henan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. “Southern China” consists of the fifteen provinces, autonomous regions, and cities under the direct control of the central government, including Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Hainan, Guangxi, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Tibet.3

This essay covers the period from 1949 to 1994.

1 Stages of Changes to Direction and Quantities of Flow of Grains and Cereals between Northern and Southern China Since 1949

To determine the stages of change to the direction and quantities of flow of grains and cereals between northern and southern China, we must first differentiate between the quantity of grains and cereals flowing from the South to the North and the quantity flowing between northern and southern China. During the period in which more grains and cereals flowed from southern to northern China, grains and cereals transfers were primarily the result of government allocations under the planned economy; we will refer to this period as the “South-to-North grain transfer” period. The period in which more grain was shipped from north to south was primarily the result of marketization reforms; we will refer to this period as the “North-to-South grain transfer” period.

Statistics compiled by the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) for total quantities of grain transfers per annum include intra-regional transfers (such as the flow of rice from Hunan to Guangdong in the South and the flow of wheat from Henan to Shanxi in the North) as well as inter-regional transfers. Statistics were not compiled purely on the basis of transfers of grains and cereals from north to south or south to north. Owing to a shortage of historical data, for this essay we have compiled statistics for total transfers in and out of northern and southern China based on statistics for annual grains and cereals transfers per province compiled by MOFCOM (see Table 11.1). To these we have added nationwide

3 Hainan was delinked from Guangdong and made an independent province in 1988. Before this, there were 14 provinces, autonomous regions, and direct-controlled cities in the South.