

A satellite view of Earth from space, showing the curvature of the planet and the blue oceans. The top half of the image is a dark blue band containing the main title in white text. The bottom half shows a detailed view of the Earth's surface with green land and blue oceans.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH 'FOOD SOVEREIGNTY' (FS)?

“食物主权” ? ——问题与疑虑

China Agricultural University, 28 April 2016

中国农业大学 2016年4月28日

- Based on my article: 'Food sovereignty via the "peasant path". A sceptical view'.
Journal of Peasant Studies, 41(6): 1031-1063, 2014
基于我的一篇文章：《以“农民之路”求食物主权：怀疑论的视角》
- See also my little book *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*, 2010
亦可参考我的小书：《农政变迁的阶级动力》（2010）
- and the special issue of the *Journal of Agrarian Change* on *Agrarian Change in Contemporary China*, edited by Carlos Oya, Jingzhong Ye and Qian Forrest Zhang, 2015
以及《农政变迁》期刊的特刊《当代中国的农政变迁》，
（卡洛斯·奥亚、叶敬忠、张谦主编，2015）

What is 'food sovereignty'? 什么是“食物主权”

Food sovereignty is defined as 食物主权被界定为：

'the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments...as a critical alternative to the dominant neoliberal model for agriculture and trade'.

“国家和人民有权控制自己的食物体系，包括自己的市场、生产模式、食物文化和环境，这是替代主流的新自由主义农业和贸易模式的关键途径。”

This conception is closely associated with La Vía Campesina ('the peasant way').

这一概念与“农民之路”有密切关联。

Some key elements of FS: 食物主权的一些要点：

1.comprehensive attack on corporate industrialised agriculture for its environmental and social devastations

对工业化的公司农业造成的环境与社会灾难进行全面批判

2. restatement and extension, in conditions of contemporary globalisation, of fundamental claim of agrarian populism: the social and moral superiority of 'peasant' (or 'small-scale') farming, and now centre-stage its ecological superiority too

在当代全球化的背景下重申并延展民粹主义的基本宣言：“小农农业”（或“小规模农耕”）在社会、道义以及生态（这是当前的核心）上具有优越性。

3. an aspiration to a new, sustainable and socially just world food order, 'reconnecting food, nature and community'

期盼一个全新的、可持续的、社会正义的世界粮食秩序，“重建食物、自然与社区的联系”。

In effect, the first and second are like thesis and antithesis, but does the third provide a synthesis as the way ahead for the world?

实际上，第一与第二个要点互为正反命题，难道第三个要点就综合性地提出了全球发展的当由之路吗？

I am sceptical.
我心有疑虑。

How the argument for food sovereignty works

食物主权的命题是如何论证的：

FS advocacy typically constructed from statements about
食物主权的宣言一般建构在以下论断之上：

◆ the global (capitalist agribusiness and markets etc) = evil

全球（资本主义农业企业与市场等）= 恶

◆ what I call 'emblematic instances' of the virtues of 'peasant'/small-scale/'family' farming as 'capital's other' = good

作为“资本”的他者——我称其为集“小农”农业/小规模农业/“家庭”农业优点于一身的“代表” = 善

‘Emblematic instances’ of individual ‘peasant’ farming (and ‘community’) - ‘capital’s other’ - show us
这些资本的他者——个体的“小农农业”（“社区”）的“代表”——
告诉我们

◆ How to save the planet
如何拯救地球

◆ How to feed its population in socially more equitable and ecologically more sustainable ways.
如何以更加平等、更加生态和更加可持续的方式养活全人类。



Food sovereignty: when and why?

食物主权：起于何时？因何而起？

- ◆ Key historical focus of FS analysis and prescription: in conjuncture of 'globalisation' since the 1970s, rise to dominance of corporate agribusiness,
食物主权的分析与判断兴起的关键历史点：与20世纪70年代开始的全球化浪潮起于同时，以对抗占主导地位的公司农业企业
- ◆ its ecological consequences: fossil fuel use, toxic contamination of soils, waters, and the food it produces, global warming etc.
(= *industrialisation of the food system*)
及其生态后果：使用了化石燃料，污染了土壤、水源和所生产的食物，导致全球变暖等（=粮食体系的工业化）。
- ◆ its social consequences including the effects of trade liberalisation for the destruction of small farmers and their ways of farming (= *capitalism versus the peasant*)
和社会后果：贸易自由化摧毁了小农和小农的生产方式（=资本主义与小农的对抗）

The FS alternative 食物主权的替代路径

different ways of farming = agroecological
small farming

不同的农耕方式 = 以农业生态学为基础的小农农业

different ways of providing food to those who do not
grow (all) their own food, e.g. urban populations, also
many rural people

用其他方式向自己不生产（或不生产全部）食物的人提供食物：如城市人口和一些农村人口。



Different ways of farming: 'capital's other'
不同的农耕方式：“资本的他者”



1. Who are the subjects/agents of alternative ways of farming? 谁是农耕替代方式的行动主体？

Defined variously in FS discourse as
食物主权的话语体系对此有不同的界定：

- ◆ ‘peasants’ 小农
- ◆ ‘poor’ peasants “贫穷的” 小农
- ◆ small farmers 小农场主
- ◆ sometimes small- and medium-scale farmers
有时又是小规模和中等规模的农场主
- ◆ ‘peasants, farmers, farm workers and indigenous communities’
“小农，农场主，农场工人和原住民社区”
- ◆ (most generically?) ‘people of the land’
(更一般的提法?) “土地上的人们”

They qualify as '**capital's other**' for their
他们能成为“资本的他者”是因为：

- ◆ sustainable farming principles and practices
他们遵循和采用了可持续的农耕原则与做法
- ◆ capacity for collective stewardship of their environments
能集体管理环境
- ◆ 'peasant frugality'
有“小农的节俭”
- ◆ 'their vision of autonomy, diversity and cooperation'
怀有自主、多元与合作的梦想
- ◆ knowledge and practice of 'indigenous technologies'
具备“乡土技术”的知识与实践。

This wholly positive picture
这种全然肯定的描述

- ◆ incorporates an abstraction of 'peasant economy' (or 'peasant mode of production')
包含了对“小农经济”（或“小农生产方式”）的抽象意象
- ◆ combined with 'emblematic instances' of 'peasant' practices
又将之与小农实践的“代表”相结合。

Some of my questions about this picture 我对这一描述的质疑

Are all peasants the same (doing things the same way)? #1

农民都一样吗？（他们做事情的方式都一样吗？）

For example: 例如

- ◆ Are there differences between 'peasants' and 'small farmers'?
“小农”和“小农场主”之间是否存在差异？
- ◆ Who are 'poor peasants', and how do they differ from those who are not 'poor'?
谁是“贫穷的小农”？他们与那些“不穷”的小农有什么区别？
- ◆ Are there social differences between small and medium farmers?
小规模农场主与中等规模农场主之间是否存在社会差异？
- ◆ Do rural workers have the same social (class) character and interests as 'peasants' and medium farmers (who employ them)?
农场工人与小农、与中等规模农场主（雇主）是否具有相同的社会（阶级）特征和利益？

◆ If some 'peasants'/small farmers practice agroecological farming (emblematic instances) and others do not, is this a matter of 'choice' or *lack of choice*?

如果有些“小农”/小规模农场主的耕作方式是有利于生态的农业（代表），而其他方式不是，那么，这是“选择”的问题，抑或是别无选择？

Both possible, but when, where and why they occur (and may change), requires close Investigation of the conditions of constraint and opportunity that different categories of small farmers confront.

两者皆有可能，但我们需要仔细考察不同类型的小规模农场主所面临的限制条件和机遇，才能回答何时，何地以及为何出现了这样的耕作方式（以及耕作方式的变迁）

In turn entails consideration of ecological and market conditions, and of the class differentiation of small (and medium) farmers →

相应地，也需要考察生态和市场的条件，以及小农场主（和中等规模农场主）的阶级分化→

Are all peasants the same (doing things the same way)? #2 农民都一样吗（他们做事的方式都一样吗？）

My general argument: there are no 'peasants' in the world of contemporary capitalist globalisation, because of
我的总体论述：当代全球化的资本主义体系中已经不存在“小农”了，因为

◆ the 'commodification of subsistence' in capitalism
资本主义体系中，生存资料被商品化，

◆ the transformation of 'peasants' into petty commodity producers
小农已经转变为小商品生产者

◆ the consequent internalisation of commodity relations in the reproduction of farming households
随后，商品关系被内化于农村家庭再生产过程中

◆ and → 而且 →

◆ inherent tendencies to class differentiation of petty commodity production,

小商品生产有内在的阶级分化的趋势

whether farming is the sole or principal basis of household reproduction or combined with other activities:

农耕是否为家庭再生产的唯一或主要基础，或是与其他生产活动共同构成家庭再生产的基础

- in branches of petty commodity production (including crafts and services)

比如从事其他小商品生产（包括手工业和服务业）

- and/or (most importantly) the sale of labour power.

和/或（最为重要的是）出卖劳动力

◆ Other closely related dynamics are the (near) ubiquity of

其他一些密切相关的变化包括（几乎）普遍存在的

◆ ‘off farm’ income for all classes of farmers (albeit typically from different sources, and for different purposes, according to class) - so-called ‘pluriactivity’

所有阶级的农民都有的“非农”收入（尽管各阶级的非农收入来源不同，目的不同）——所谓的“多重活动”

rural labour markets on which much ‘peasant’ farming depends (both selling and buying labour power)

和农村劳动力市场，“小农”的耕作依赖于此（购买、出售劳动力）

And peasant 'community'? 而农民“社区”？

- ◆ Peasant 'community' is another central idea or value in discourses of agrarian populism and FS. 小农“社区”是民粹主义和食物主权话语中的一个核心概念或价值观

The principles attributed to it include

它的主要原则包括：

cooperation 合作

Reciprocity 互惠

egalitarianism 平等主义

the values of (highly) localised identity

对（高度）本土化的身份的褒扬

- ◆ Some rural communities might come closer to these qualities in certain conditions; **others do not!**
一些农村社区在某些情况下可能与上述特征有相近之处，而另一些则无；
- ◆ And ideologies of ('communal') egalitarianism are undermined by relations and practices of class and gender inequality
“社区”平等主义的意识形态受到阶级与性别的不平等关系的侵害。

*Capital's (agroecological) other and its
'emblematic instances'*

资本的（农业生态的）他者和它的“代表”

Interrogating the 'emblematic instances' of 'peasant'
agroecological farming used in FS advocacy, and
several examples in my paper

质疑了食物主权所倡导的以农业生态为基础的小农农业的“代表”，我的文章中也有一些案例

Three important conclusions →

三个重要结论 →

Three important conclusions

1. agroecological food farming in some cases possible only because the major part of household income/reproduction comes from outside farming, not least wage labour

在有些时候，人们之所以能够从事以农业生态学为基础的农耕活动，可能因为绝大部分的家庭收入/家庭再生产来自农耕之外，尤其是工薪收入。

2. low-input farming, the agroecological ideal, is generally also low-output, hence may achieve self-sufficiency in household food provision, but without any surplus to feed others who do not farm

农业生态学理想中的低投入农业，一般也是低产出的，因此，或许可以满足家庭的食物需求，却没有剩余以养活那部分不种田的人口。

Three important conclusions

3. the big issue and constraint in low-input farming is labour productivity; in conditions where very high labour input required for agroecological farming (eg soil and water conservation works), this favours household able to mobilise most labour

低投入农业最大的问题和瓶颈在于劳动生产率。以农业生态学为基础的农耕要求较高的劳动力投入（如修建水土保持工程），这有利于能够调动劳动力的家庭

= usually richer households, hence reflects and contributes to class (and gender) Differentiation

= 这些家庭一般更富裕，这反映并加剧了阶级（和性别）的分化。

Thus my scepticism about different ('alternative') ways of farming.

因此，我对不同的农耕方式（“替代路径”）心存怀疑。

What about

不如说：

*Different ways of supplying non-farmers with food
(transforming the world food system)?*

为不事稼穡的人提供食物的其他路径（改变世界粮食体系）？

Farming and agriculture 农耕与农业

- ◆ Farming is what farmers do and have always done - with all the historical diversity of forms of farm production, their social and ecological conditions and practices, Technologies and labour processes, and so on
农耕是农民一直从事的活动——历史上有农业生产的多种形式，其社会、生态条件和实践，技术与劳动力过程等多有不同。
- ◆ Agriculture or the 'agricultural sector' emerged in the period of industrial capitalism from the 1870s, and includes farming together with all those economic interests, and their specialized institutions and activities, 'upstream' and 'downstream' of farming that affect the activities and reproduction of farmers
农业或“农业部门”在19世纪70年代的工业资本主义时期兴起，是指农耕以及影响农民的行为和再生产的所有经济利益（集团）、他们的专门制度和活动以及处于农耕“上游”与“下游”的行业。

The effect, then, for any viable programme of FS is that – even assuming that enough surplus food can be produced by agroecological farming to feed non-farming populations - there have to be ways of buying, processing, and distributing that food, ‘alternative’ to capitalist agribusiness and markets.

结果是，即便我们假定生态农业能够生产出足够的粮食养活非农人口，也必须找到食物的购买、加工和分配的新方式，以取代资本主义的农业企业和市场，这样食物主权的方案才行得通。

FS advocates have not been able to say very much about this 'downstream' side, especially:

食物主权至今未能对农业的“下游”领域有所建言，特别是未能指出：

what kinds of market reforms could plausibly meet the needs of *both* 'small farmers' and food consumers, especially low-income consumers?

应当进行何种市场改革才能满足“小农场主”和食物消费者（尤其是低收入消费者）双方的需求？

And the state...? 而国家呢？

Some key policies needed to make FS a reality:
需要一些关键政策才能让食物主权成为现实：

- regulating international (and domestic) trade in food commodities
对国际（国内）食品贸易进行管制
- protecting and promoting small-scale farming
保护和促进小规模农业生产
- 'scaling up' from the local to the national, *and*
将小规模农业生产从本地拓展到全国层面
- subsidising both (small) farm incomes and consumer prices for food sourced from small farmers
对（小）农场给予补贴，同时让消费者能够以补贴价购买小农场生产的产品。

Some experience of such policies in the modern world but no modern state has satisfied all of them at the same time

现代社会有些推行了这些政策，但没有一个现代国家同时实行了所有政策

A further issue: some FS advocates clearly anti-statist, hence difficult for them consistently to call on states to establish FS as a programme

进一步的议题：有些食物主权的拥趸显然是反政府主义者，他们很难持续地呼吁政府将食物主权作为方案。

At the same time, they welcome enthusiastically commitments to FS by governments, largely disregarding the near complete absence of any progress towards FS

与此同时，他们又热情地拥抱着政府为食物主权许下的承诺，而没有注意到，我们离食物主权何止万里之遥。

FS: from project to programme?

食物主权：从项目到工程？

My scepticism about FS centres on

我对食物主权的怀疑主要集中于：

1. a critique of any 'peasant way', of beliefs that 'peasants' practising low-(external) input intensive farming with low labour productivity, can feed current and projected world population

批评小农能以低（外部）投入、低劳动生产率的精耕细作养活目前及将来的全球人口的小农农业方式或论断

2. the failure of FS on the 'downstream' side necessary to move forward from its binary of thesis and antithesis, towards a synthesis that yields any viable programme of 'transformation'.

食物主权未能考虑到农业的“下游”环节，因此未能超越它的正反命题的二元论述，未能合成可行的“转型”方案。

Moreover, this failure is *intrinsic* given that FS discards crucial elements of

而且，这种失败是食物主权内在固有的，因为为了建立它的正反命题（尤其是反命题——资本的他者），它忽视了以下关键因素：

- ◆ agrarian political economy 农业政治经济学
- ◆ the political economy of capitalism more broadly, and 资本主义的政治经济学，以及更广泛的
- ◆ modern history 现代历史

in order to establish its thesis and especially its antithesis: capital's other.

This failure is particularly surprising, and alarming, in relation to both the theorisation and historical investigation of the conditions of reproduction of peasantries (small farmers/petty commodity producers), including the lack of socioeconomic analysis of those acclaimed for their agroecological virtue (emblematic instances).

在对他们所宣称的农业生态上的优点缺少社会经济学分析的情况下，在我们对小农（小农场主/小商品生产者）的再生产条件进行理论和历史探讨时，这种失败尤其让人惊讶和警醒。