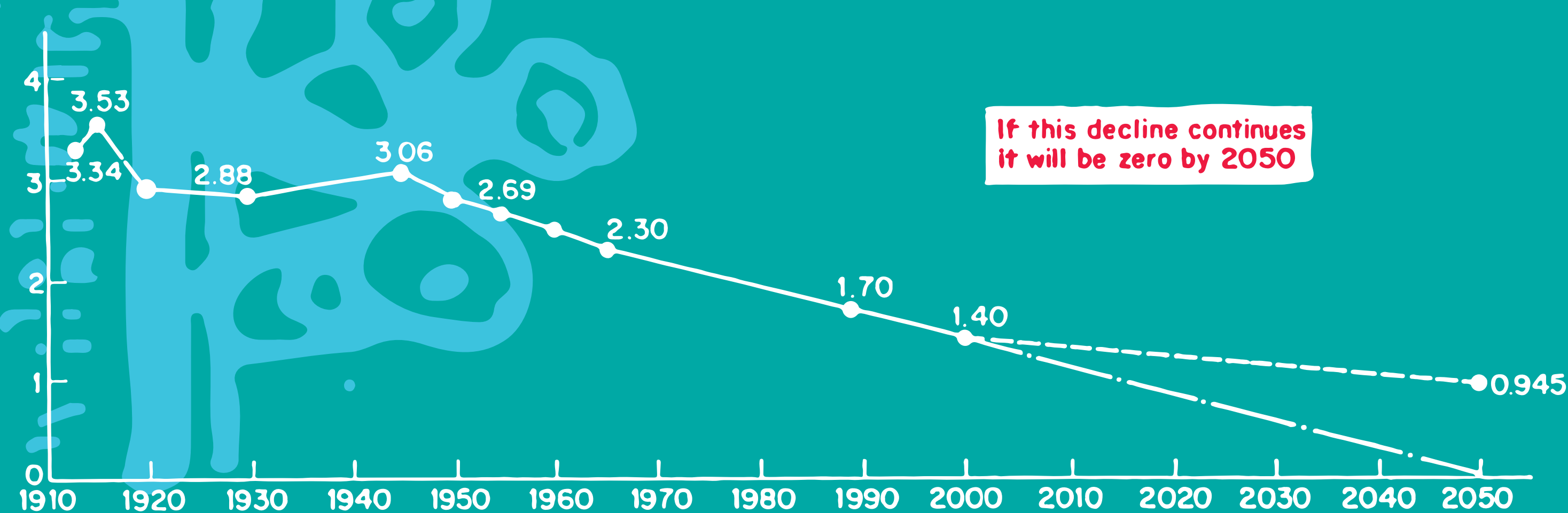


The Introduction of Organic Agriculture in CHINA 1980 – 1990



CHINA today is a leading market for organic food¹

Yet the background of the introduction of organic food production in China is little researched. The research project wants to close this gap. It examines discussions of Chinese agronomists about organic agriculture preceding the first organic crop in China in 1990.



Cropland per capita (mu) [1 mu = 1/15 ha] as projected by Cai 1990²

WHICH FACTORS LED TO THE INTRODUCTION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN CHINA?

1

China having considerably less farmland per capita than other countries and a rapidly growing population, preserving soil fertility was a major concern. Loss of arable land, blamed on previous agricultural policy, was seen as posing a huge threat on long-term food security. Organic agriculture with its emphasis on soil health should help preserve existing farmland.

„Machine farming and the application of chemical fertilizers are the two main causes for soil erosion.“
Ren and Kong 1981³

2

„Some developed countries invest heavily in mechanization, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, mineral resources etc ... We do not want and cannot afford to go down this path. ... We should take a path that combines improving technology and living conditions of all organisms.“
Luo 1982⁴

In the context of economic reform starting in the late 1970s, rural China changed dramatically under decollectivization and the new family responsibility system. As a labor-intensive farming system requiring little initial investment, organic farming was deemed better suited to Chinese conditions.

3

Chinese agronomists took concepts of organic farming mainly from the USA. These concepts from the USA themselves were heavily inspired by farming techniques found in Asia as for example described in *Farmers of Forty Centuries* by F.H. King in 1911.⁵ Thus the ‘foreign’ concept of organic farming allowed for a re-evaluation of existing local organic farming techniques as neither backwards nor ‘red’ as during the Mao era,⁶ but as sustainable and essentially modern.

„Intensive cultivation is central to the traditional art of farming in our country and constitutes a solid basis for establishing organic agriculture.“
Li 1983⁷

Concerns about long-term food safety

Search for an alternative path to modernization

Re-evaluation of existing techniques

References

The basis for the above statements is a body of 26 articles from Chinese scientific journals and 12 newspaper articles dating from 1980 to 1993. All translations by MW.

¹ FiBL “Organic Farming Statistics” Accessed 17.10.17. <http://www.fibl.org/en/themes/organic-farming-statistics.html>.
² Cai Yunlong (1990). “Land use and management in PR China: Problems and strategies.” *Land Use Policy* 7 (4), 339.
³ Ren Jueming and Kong Yishi (1981). “Discussing Problems and Solutions of Modernizing Agriculture Means Choosing China’s Future Agriculture.” *World Agriculture* 4: 3.
⁴ Luo Zicheng (1982). “Questions Regarding the Strategy for Developing the Agriculture of our Country.” *Study and Research* 3: 94.
⁵ Paull, John (2011)

“The making of an agricultural classic: *Farmers of forty centuries or permanent agriculture in China, Korea and Japan, 1911-2011.*” *Agricultural Sciences*, 02(03), 175-180.
⁶ Schmalzer, Sigrid (2016). *Red revolution, green revolution: Scientific farming in socialist China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
⁷ Li Weiwu (1983). “Initial Thoughts on Organic Agriculture.” *Agricultural Economy* 3: 22.