

SNAPSHOTS



Deng Hongmei (right) shows a measuring instrument to her employer. PHOTOS BY SONG WEIWEI / XINHUA



Married couple Li Bing and Deng Hongmei work as modern *maike*, casual harvest laborers.



Crops are ripe when autumn falls in the village of Junlian in Shanghang county, East China's Fujian province.



The couple spend a lot of time in the truck during the harvest season.

Large farms help revive a traditional career

By CHINA DAILY

Maikē, a traditional career in China, is taking on a new look. Decades ago, *maikē*, or casual laborers who help others with harvesting wheat in some areas, made a living by toiling in the wheat fields in northwestern China in such places as Shaanxi and Gansu provinces and the Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

They used to be poor, landless farmers who had to struggle to earn very little money by harvesting many hectares of wheat. A sickle was their only tool.

However, *maikē* have turned modern with the development of China's agriculture, especially in recent years with the boom of large-scale farming.

To solve two of the pressing problems of the Chinese countryside — a rapid increase in elderly farmers and poor yields from the country's hundreds of millions of small plots — China has

been encouraging large-scale farming in the past few years.

The policy gives rise to a revival of the traditional *maikē* career, with an increasing number of farmers taking on this new job to help large farms to harvest — not with sickles, but with machines.

Married couple Li Bing and Deng Hongmei are two of the modern *maikē*. The two natives of Yangzhou, in East China's Jiangsu province, have driven a reaper and a truck to many places in China in the past three years to harvest thousands of hectares of crops.

This year, one of their destinations is the village of Junlian in Shanghang county, East China's Fujian province, where they will work 40 hectares of paddy.

Although declining to disclose their income, Li said they do make a small fortune by being modern *maikē*, earning much more than a typical migrant worker.



Li Bing and Deng Hongmei work late until darkness falls.

