Interviewee: Yand Du, male, born in 1946, Dafendi, Baiyun Village, Fengqing county, Yunnan Province

Interviewer: Li Xinmin, female, born in 1988, Caochangdi

Time: January 7, 2011

Location: Yang Du’s home

Transcript:

Yang: During the years of collectivization, I was a work point marker at the production team. I was working as an accountant, cashier and keeper at the same time. Our children don’t care about us now. I did great work at that time. I’m not 66 years old. None of my children is looking after my wife and me. We totally relied on ourselves for clothing, eating and housing.

Ming: Grandpa, are you looking at me?

Yang: It turns out that I still have over 10 years of life ahead of me. Whatever. We don't have food here or there, except something that I earn by hard work. That’s enough. Let’s not talk about this. Is this called an interview? I’ve never seen one before.

Min: Can you tell me where you were at the time of collectivization?

Yang: At the time of collectivization I was right here at Dafendi.

Min: How did you eat at mess halls?

Yang: We ate collectively at mess halls: Huo grass, sugarcane bagasse, yams. Couldn’t imagine to live well like right now. We have so much food now. We are aged not and cannot eat that much. One bowl or two is enough. Ah, collectivization has made us anxious and fearful. Even to think of it makes one sigh. Oh well, it is gone.

Min: What did people eat when mess halls did not serve enough, grandpa?

Yang: When there wasn’t enough food at mess halls, we could only endure the hunger. My dad was starkly starved to death. There wasn’t anything to eat. If the mess halls had closed sooner, maybe he wouldn’t have died. He might have lived into his 60s. My dad was around 56 when he died. He was starved in the mess halls. Mess halls should have been closed earlier. Many people would have been alive.

Min: Did my great grandpa die of hunger?

Yang: Yes. He had 3 liang of rice every day, but he needed 1 liang and 5 qian per meal. He was big. These years we have had more than enough food just by working on our own. I applied to be recognized as without insurance. Took a picture for my ID a few days ago. They took the household register of me, an old person in his 60s. They said I would get subsidies. Yesterday Li Guotai told me that that was a lie.

Min: Your mom said that you were an accountant during the collectivization?

Yang: I was an accountant, cashier and a keeper. I also looked after kids.

Min: Grandpa, wasn’t your family starved when you were doing these?

Yang: Everyone was starved at least a little bit. When your great grandpa died, I was studying in the city. I was also studying there when mess halls opened. I came back when I was assigned after school. I need to tell the story from the beginning for the interview.

Min: But you would not talk about the details?

Yang: Oh, I can’t talk well. Had a drink.

Min: Say whatever you want to. How much do you remember about the past?

Yang: In the Baiyun Village, our Dafendi was the poorest. Zhongshan was the most advanced. People came from Luodang to audit my accounts. If something was wrong, I would be prisoned for 2 or 3 years. The result was that the amounts of food and money were all accurate. At first, they didn’t even drink the water we offered, because they thought we were suspects. Later, when everything turned out okay, they started to chat with us with smiles. We were good people. We had no corruption or embezzlement. We acted with propriety.

Min: Did they go to you because you were an accountant?

Yang: Yeah. Accountant, cashier and keeper. They didn’t find out anything. If they did, I would face a sentence of 3 years. Now I have two cows. Eating and working are simple. When not hired, I graze cattle. I get up early. No matter when I go to bed, I get up to drink tea and smoke.

Min: About people that died?

Yang: How many people died eating in the mess halls!

Min: Here?

Yang: Yeah. That’s all. I’m 66 years old and I can’t remember clearly after the drink. When I plough others’ fields, I bring my plough there and come back to craze the cattle. I used to graze the cattle carrying the plough.

Min: Is great grandpa the only one that died of hunger?

Yang: Many people of our village died because of the mess halls.

Min: How about your family?

Yang: Your great grandpa was the only one. No one was there when he died. The mess hall was managed by Li Shaoqing’s family, so they offered some food the next day. My father was born in the year of rooster. He would have been more than 100 years old now.

Min: How old was he?

Yang: He died at 56 years old. We didn’t have any wood. My brother got a board from the teahouse and buried him. I wasn’t even notified. I was studying. I have renovated this large house twice.

Yang’s wife: My mother said you should just sell the two cows. Your big grandma was with me: selling one cow will only support us for a year. We need support all year round. When your grandpa is out, I am still staying here.

Min: Have you sorted it out?

Yang’s wife: I usually eat at your little uncle’s. I eat alone sometimes or eat with them.

Yang: They are often just getting up when we want breakfast. What can we eat?

Yang’s wife: They think I am clumsy. I wear my unwashed clothes for 2 or 3 months and I throw them away. Honestly, I don’t wash the clothes often because I am cold in the winter.

Yang: How can they put the chicken away before sunset? We don't do this at Baiyun Village. Chicken are not like cattle, sheep and pigs. I let the chicken out one day. Even though you hate me, I will always like this. They killed a pig and I had some of it.

Yang’s wife: She carried the pork to her mom’s place. Her parents are still working, raising 14 or 15 pigs. Her dad was born in the year of horse and older than me. Her mom year of mouse. She is 3 years younger than me.