Interviewee: Yang Guangyue (Female, b. 1928, villager of Wangjiayan Village, Hunan Province)

Interviewer: Jia Zhitan (Male, b. 1951, villager of Jimingqiao Village, Hunan Province, filmmaker)

Interview Date: July 3, 2010

Interview Location: Yang Guangyue’s home

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**Interviewer’s Note**

Yang Guangyue is from the same village where my wife Zhao Yongchun is from. I usually call her Aunt Yang. Her husband Zhao Delan passed away in 1993. Now she lives alone in the house her youngest son Zhao Yongxue newly built. Her son and daughter-in-law both work in a hotel in Changsha. Aunt Yang’s life is pretty good. In front of my camera, she told me proudly, “Brother Jia, now I’m really living a life with electric lamps and telephones on both upstairs and downstairs! Compared to that period of time! To talk about my sufferings during that time will take several days and night.”

**Interview Content**

**During the “Great Leap Forward,” my family’s house was demolished and used as firewood for making bricks**

During the “Great Leap Forward” in 1958, they were making some manure. They wanted to demolish my house. Because my “class status” was not good, so when they claimed they were going to demolish my house, I didn’t dare to say anything. After the house was demolished, all the bed parts and purlins were taken to be used as firewood for making bricks. The bricks were then taken to Luojiaping. When the house was being demolished, lots of silver coins were dug out underneath the house, and therefore lots of people scrambled to take the coins. I got a small packet too. However, when Zhao XX arrived, he grabbed it from me and said it was state property. There were also Zhao Deyan, Zhao Dezhao, and Zhao Dechun, but he didn’t take theirs. Later after I got off work and went home, I was told that the silver coins were saved by my paternal grandpa Zhao Minghua when he opened a shop by the roadside. However, he suddenly got sick and was unable to talk! Before he passed away, he pointed at the ground, but no one understood what it meant until house got demolished.

**I was accused of opposing the “Great Leap Forward” because I didn’t go to the “Sisters Team” and was punished to run several laps**

In the second half of 1959, Zhao XX wanted me to join the “Sisters Team” (“Youth Commando”). Zhao Yongyao was the team leader, and Luo Tongrui was the “state cadre” (Note: a cadre sent by the higher-level government). Everyone said that the workload was very heavy there, so I was not willing to join the team. However, who knew it would be a problem for me to not join because of my bad class status, even though others were able to say no? They said I, as a rich peasant, didn’t follow the order and accused me of opposing the “Great Leap Forward”.

On the same day, I was taken to the brigade and was asked to run in the courtyard at Yang Shiying’s place. I had to run around the courtyard with a wooden horse on my back. They asked you to run for 100 laps and you couldn't run slowly. They kept urging you to run fast.

I was not the only one running! There were lots of people, including Cai Shengqia’s mom, Sister Tang Yulan, and Mother Qiao, that is Tang Xijie’s mom. They were all old ladies and some even had bound feet, so how could they run? Because I was very young and had lots of strength, and also because I felt aggrieved, I ran as fat as I could with the wooden horse on my back. When I was running, I kept stepping on the bound feet in front of me. Therefore sister Tang Yulan and others kept yelling, “aiyo! Aiyo!” I pretended that I didn’t hear them and continued running as fast as I could. Those in charge were standing aside and laughing at us. They probably didn’t treat us as human beings. I finished first. After I finished, they didn’t ask me to join the team again.

**Carrying the “Lazy Guy Sign”**

Another thing was the “Lazy Guy Sign”. During the Great Leap Forward, we were asked to go to work early and get off work late. The brigade made a wooden plate with “Lazy Guy Sign” written on it. If someone got up late, the plate would be put in front of that person’s house! You then had to get up early and gave the plate to someone else who got up late. If you failed to gave the plate to someone else within seven days, you would lose several hundred work points and a criticizing meeting would be held targeted at you. Once this plate was put in front of my house! I couldn't find a way to give it to someone else! I was really anxious! I then talked to Mother Deng and Zhao Dehai’s mom. They said, “you should get up early and put it front of your next door neighbor Yang Shiying.”

I followed their suggestion. The next morning, I got up before dawn. When I was ready to quietly put the sign in front of Yang Shiying’s house, she was already sitting there! I then had to quietly turn my back and left. The same thing happened for several mornings. She probably got up around midnight. My neighbor Yang Shiying was a landlord. I could only give the plate to someone like that. Who would dare to give it to those with good class statuses (Note: poor and lower middle peasants)?! I was never able to give the plate to someone else and therefore lost several hundred work points. I didn’t even get the sticky rice at Mid-Autumn Festival. To celebrate the festive, others could make some sticky rice cakes to eat, while I had nothing at all. The house was cold and gloomy. While it was okay for the adults, the kids, knowing others had cakes, were sitting outside other people’s houses and watching their kids eating.

**Once at work someone reported that I didn’t work hard enough, so I was punished to beat gongs whiling parading on the street**

Another time, together with my sister-in-law, Zhao Rennian, you should know her, I was making manure in Tanjiaping. We needed to shovel the turf, mixed it with lime, piled up the mixture and sealed it with mud. While I was working, Li XX passed by and noticed us. He claimed that I didn’t use turf but only soil. He was from Lijialaowu in Heping Brigade, so we were in the same brigade. He was some cadre at the brigade, in charge of something. He then reported me to the brigade! The brigade asked me to beat two gongs and parade through Shuangyu, Shengli, and Heping brigades. I had to walk all the way from one village to another! Under the supervision of Li XX. While beating the gongs, I had to shout, “don’t copy me. We rich peasants are dishonest and don’t work hard.” I was beating the gongs while she (Zhao Rennian) shouted the words! It was a freezing winter day, and the wind was like a blade cutting our faces. After we finished, we had to report to the brigade again! They even asked me to make a promise before letting me go home.

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